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Block shows promise for downtown[Print Page](#)**By the Messenger-Inquirer**

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A historic downtown block is seeing new life thanks to private investment and a plan for the future.

Last week, a crane towered over Peachtree Antique Gallery & Mall on West Second Street as work began on a new roof for buildings severely damaged by a fire more than five years ago. The shell of the buildings has been open to the elements since the fire, and co-owner Larry Peech said it's the first major step in renovating the building.

"I see a building being restored," Peech told the Messenger-Inquirer last week. "People can see 104 and 106 (West Second Street) coming back to life."

Around the corner from the work, a crowd gathered at West Third and Allen streets Wednesday morning for the auction of 101 and 103 W. Third St. The two buildings, which are 116 years old, fetched a total of \$127,000 at auction, and new owner Larry Conder said restoration work is ahead.

What's seen in this one block is much of the hope for downtown -- investment from the private sector to restore historic buildings while reinventing them for new purposes.

The West Second Street buildings are crucial because of their placement along what is a primary corridor through downtown. West Second Street will be going through its own changes when it returns to being a two-way street, and this main stretch has already become home to several new downtown business draws.

With the downtown master plan, the goal has been to attract new businesses downtown and see vacant properties return to use. The hope, with new downtown overlay districts and development guidelines, has been that that goal can be achieved while preserving historic structures or requiring new structures to fit within the style and function of what exists today.

Historic preservation should be a priority downtown, but not just for preservation's sake. The rebirth of these properties comes with a plan for their reuse, not just renovation.

The West Third Street properties are in serious disrepair, but Conder's hope is that work to restore them will mean new restaurants or other businesses occupying them in the future. Conder has track record of bringing new use to West Second Street properties, including the Smith-Werner building that was gutted and restored by county government and then developed by Conder. The Smith-Werner building now houses eating and drinking establishments on the ground floor with residential space above. That same model could be replicated with these West Third Street buildings.

Also sold at last week's auction was 224 Allen St., which was built in 1900 and has already been restored. New owner Leo Portaluppi said he hopes to use the building as a restaurant, which would be his third in Owensboro.

These are the types of investments that those who worked on and have supported the downtown master plan envisioned. This is historic preservation that holds on to the past while offering new function and purpose for the future.

Within this downtown block, it's easy to see the promise of and commitment to downtown.

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