

Fire station planned at Drew plant site

by Mark Gabriel

The Town of North Wilkesboro is planning to take a portion of the old American Drew Furniture plant site on the CBD Loop for a new fire department building, as well as other possible government structures.

The 28-acre site where the American Drew plant once operated in North Wilkesboro has been abandoned for a number of years, and the town recently has been seeking potential clients who might put that property to other uses.

Town officials say North Wilkesboro is considering acquiring 4.25 acres of the site to use for a new location for the town fire department as a part of the redevelopment proposal.

North Wilkesboro commissioners are set to consider the proposal Thursday in a special session to be held just before the board's monthly work session. The meeting is scheduled for 5:30 p.m. at town hall.

After hearing more on the plan Thursday, town commissioners are expected to call for a public hearing on the proposal, tentatively set for Aug. 4 at 7 p.m. at town hall.

"The development of the property will increase the taxable value and business prospects of North Wilkesboro and enhance the economic development of the downtown area, as well as have a significant positive aesthetic impact on downtown," according to a statement from the town.

The town plans to demolish the old furniture factory buildings on the full 28-acre site, except for the three-story office building at the corner of D Street and the loop. The plans also call for building roads and sidewalks within the area, town officials said.

The estimated cost for town's commitment to the project is \$750,000. The town plans to pay for its commitment through a bank loan, money from the town's fund balance, or a combination of the two.

The plan also includes acceptance of the site as a "brownfield" by the N.C. Department of Environmental and Natural Resources for the redevelopment plan.

Brownfields are "real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant," according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency website.