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Beacon gives artists space to live in, create

Special-use permit issued

By Craig Wolf

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BEACON -- Studio space for artists is moving off the drawing boards and into reality in this city.

Spire Studios, occupying part of the former Fun Services building on North Avenue, got the first special-use permit for artist spaces on Aug. 18, and developer Todd Spire expects to dedicate the space Sept. 13.

A few blocks away, the former Beacon High School building on Fishkill Avenue will be renamed "Bulldog Studios" when it's opened by the nonprofit Beacon Cultural Foundation.

Some other projects for spaces that can serve the dual uses of work and living have been proposed, though progress on those ideas has been slower.

Spire, a graphic artist and operator of the NYNarts.com Web site, said the city council's approval of the permit was more than just another bureaucratic step, but a precedent-setting one.

Paving the way

"Its benefit is that it very much legitimizes what we, as artists, need to accomplish our goals. Our process was delayed because we were the 'first,' " he wrote in an e-mail to supporters recently. "However, this sacrifice clears the way for other artists in the future; it acknowledges a respect between the town and its new artistic population; and it helps solidify the future of the arts within this community."

Eight studios have been laid out on the second floor of the building, plus an exhibition space and an "apartment-like communal area complete with kitchen and shower." Three more studios and four photo darkrooms are planned.

Kathy Feighery, a Cold Spring painter, signed up for one of Spire's studios.

"I'm really, really excited about it," Feighery said Monday. "There's a whole lot of energy right now. I think it has to do with eight artists being under one roof."

Spire said rates are under \$1 per square foot per month and that the plan is to keep them reasonable.

A special-use permit for the Bulldog Studios will be discussed at a city council public hearing in September, said Sara Pasti, director of Beacon Cultural Foundation.

Variances have been granted by the zoning board of appeals and the planning board has issued a favorable recommendation, she said. The building will offer dozens of varied spaces for rent by artists.