

The Berkshire Eagle

Spice and the Beacon

Editorial

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Thursday, May 29 The Pittsfield City Council's approval of a \$1.1 million loan from the GE Economic Development Fund to the Beacon Cinema project and the reincarnation of Spice means that North Street will be bustling in July. The anticipated beginning of construction of the theater and the appearance of Jae's Spice should provide a summer jolt after the well-documented struggles of spring.

Spice, which closed its doors in March, didn't find its audience, but it also carried a heavy burden of expectations that no restaurant needs to be saddled with, especially in these difficult economic times. Business partners Joyce Bernstein and Larry Rosenthal and executive chef Douglas Luf are now joining with North Berkshire restaurateur Jae Chung to fashion a restaurant that includes Asian dishes with the fine-dining approach of Spice. The varied menu may attract a wider clientele as the restaurant looks to find its footing in what is not an easy market.

The City Council's unanimous vote on the GE loan, with Councilors Peter Marchetti and Michael Ward abstaining because of their employers' business relationships with theater developer Richard Stanley, constituted a ringing endorsement of a project whose potential is as considerable as it is complex. To see construction actually begin on what is now a \$22.4 million project in the Kinnell-Kresge building would put many minds at ease around the city.

Like the City Council, we hope that Mr. Stanley and the Berkshire County Building Trades Association

can reach an agreement in which local contractors can join Allegrone Construction carpenters on the theater project, but this dispute did not justify the requested two-week delay. The project has been delayed enough, and, given the complexity of funding involving local banks, state grants and GE funding, it is important that it get under way. Ideally, in late 2009, the theater project will be drawing people to an energized North Street.

There is an element of risk to the project, as Ward 5 Councilor Jonathan Lothrop observed Tuesday night, but he contrasted that risk to the futility of the city watching its North Street theaters rot away because it had no idea of what to do with them. A petition presented to the council by more than 400 young people endorsing the theater project speaks to its potential to involve youth more fully in a city that hasn't always reached out to them. The Beacon Cinema project is well worth whatever risk is being taken on its behalf.

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