

# Partners opening co-working space on upper North Street

*Downtown site provides workplace alternative for range of potential users*

BY JOHN TOWNES

Two prominent adjacent storefronts in downtown Pittsfield are being converted into a new generation of workplace, known as a "co-working" space, for entrepreneurs, small business owners and other professionals.

Framework LLC has acquired a long-term lease on the storefronts at 435 to 439 North St. The new firm is currently doing extensive construction work on the 5,000-square foot

interior to create a mix of private offices and open shared workspaces.

Slated to open in early autumn, the facility will include office support services and amenities such as Wi-Fi, printers, conference rooms, areas for smaller meetings, and a kitchen area, which will be available for users.

"We saw a need for this in Pittsfield," said co-developer Tim Burke. "There are a lot of people who bounce around among coffeehouses and other public spaces to do their work on their laptops. This will offer them a dedicated workspace with office services."

Burke is a partner in Framework LLC with

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Scott Moraes (left) and Tim Burke are collaborating on a new membership-based co-working space and related suite of private offices in two adjacent storefronts on upper North Street in downtown Pittsfield.

## WORKplace

### Co-working space

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Scott Moraes, a yoga instructor who operates Radiance Yoga at 401 North St. in Pittsfield and Yoga Great Barrington.

Framework will offer three basic options for users, including ongoing memberships for unlimited access, single-use day passes, and rentals of private offices.

Burke said that to gauge the potential level of interest when the project was in the preliminary planning stages, they conducted an informal market survey. They set up a general Facebook page explaining the concept and an online form requesting input.

"Without being specific, we asked, 'Are you interested in the idea of a shared office space in Pittsfield?' Within a few weeks we had gotten about 150 positive responses," Burke said. He added that they held a gathering at Hotel on North in June to introduce the project, and about 60 people showed up for that.

The new co-working space is oriented to several types of users, including freelancers and independent contractors, telecommuters, start-up entrepreneurs and owners of small businesses.

Among the potential users are people whose work is primarily done on computers. It also provides a base to handle business tasks for people who perform other types of work in various locations. It is also oriented to people who have a home office, but want to periodically get out of the house and be in a community environment. Others may include visitors who require a temporary workspace while in Pittsfield.

Burke noted that Framework LLC and the project grew out of the two partners' own experiences.

Burke grew up in Pittsfield, and had lived in the Boston area for 15 years, where he worked in finance and corporate planning.

"My wife and I are both from the Berkshires, and we wanted to move back here," he said. They made the move in 2016.



Two prominent storefronts on upper North Street are being developed for related but separate purposes. The space to the left will house a number of small offices for lease to businesses and professionals. The space to the right will be a fully equipped co-working space that will be accessed on a membership basis.

He also started a new venture, Mill Town Capital (milltowncapital.com), a private investment firm to provide capital and guidance to emerging and existing entrepreneurial firms in Berkshire County. It has an emphasis on ventures involved in agricultural, environmental and creative technology.

"While developing that, I've spent a lot of time working on my laptop in coffeehouses and cafes," Burke said.

He met Moraes, who also does business tasks for his yoga businesses on a mobile basis. "We started talking about how great

it would be to have a shared workspace in Pittsfield, where people like us could work and have access to the features of an office without the high overhead," he said. "When we learned these spaces on North Street were available, we contacted the owners, and it led to this."

#### Notable site

Framework's shared office venture is the first significant sign of life in several years for the upper North Street site.

The two storefronts have been notable for their visibility, as well as their shifting status in the mix of ongoing efforts to revitalize downtown Pittsfield.

The commercial block became prominent about 10 years ago as an early attempt to bring upscale development to upper North Street. Developer George Whaling renovated and marketed the building as condominiums, with residential units on the upper floors and the two commercial storefront condominiums at street level.

It also became a visible symbol of the arts component of revitalization in 2007, when the high-profile Ferrin Gallery moved from Lenox into one of the storefronts.

The other storefront was originally a store called Berkshire Native, which sold regional crafts. It subsequently was occupied by Museum Facsimiles, a Pittsfield business that provides art-related services and products. Its popular retail store offers framing services, prints and other artwork, and a variety of gift items.

However, the spaces subsequently lost their luster and fell on hard times.

Ferrin Gallery closed in 2013 when owner Leslie Ferrin changed her business model to other forms of marketing. That space has been vacant until now.

Museum Facsimiles vacated the other space when it moved to its present location on South Street at Park Square a few years ago. That storefront has also been largely empty since then, except for a few short-term occupants who came and went quickly.

The properties were on the market until last year, when a real estate investment group purchased them.

Framework's lease with the owners allows them to remodel the interior to fit the needs of the business. The work is being done by B&B Micro Manufacturing Inc., a North Adams construction business (*see related story on page 1*).

Burke said that the specific layout of offices and furnishings will be flexible, based on the needs of users and patterns of activity.

The former Museum Facsimiles space is being divided into about a half-dozen private offices.

The other section where Ferrin Gallery was located will be a shared workspace. It will have an open, flexible design, with tables and seating and office equipment in a way that provides varied workstations. In the rear, it will have a kitchenette and eating area.

A couple of rooms between the two main sections are being opened to connect the two sides. These will primarily serve as conference rooms that are available for use by office tenants and co-work members.

The specific rates and terms of use are still being developed and will be based on the type of use and facility. "There will be different options available," said Burke.

Burke estimated that a basic membership for access to the shared space and facilities will be around \$185 a month, while a day pass will be about \$25. (More information is at [www.pittsfieldco-working.com](http://www.pittsfieldco-working.com).) "People can try it out with a day pass and see if they want to sign up for a full membership," he said.

The private offices will be on a rental basis. "We'll price them to be competitive with other downtown office space," said Burke.

Initially the center will be open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. six days a week. Burke said they will explore options for providing access to the space at other times.

It requires planning to ensure that members will have a seat and workspace available when they come in. There will be an on-site "community manager" during the day, whose job will include coordinating the activities there.

Burke said they will limit the number of memberships to keep usage at manageable levels. "Also, people work in different ways on different schedules, so there should always be a space available," he said.

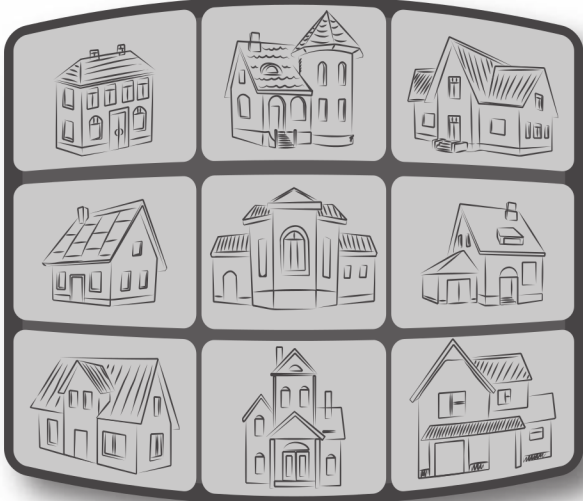
In addition to the pragmatic benefits of having access to an equipped workspace at an affordable price, Burke said the co-working model also tends to foster a sense of connection among members.

"We want this to become a community of people who like what they do and are passionate about it," he said, noting that this can apply on both a social and business level.

"There is a networking component, because you are around other people and have opportunities to interact," he said. "That can lead to business opportunities too. Studies at one co-working space indicated that a large percentage of business that members did was with other members." ♦

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