

AN EDUCATION IN ADVENTURE AT THE RIDGE ACADEMY

FLATHEAD LIVING

HOME
ON THE
RANGE

MAINTAINING
AN ICONIC HERD
IN MOIËSE

VINOTURE'S
VINTAGE
CRAFT

FINE FURNISHINGS
CREATED FROM
RECLAIMED WINE
BARRELS

SPRING
MOTIVATION

LOCALS WHO INSPIRE US, STARRING
BIGFORK SENSATION MAKENA MORI FY

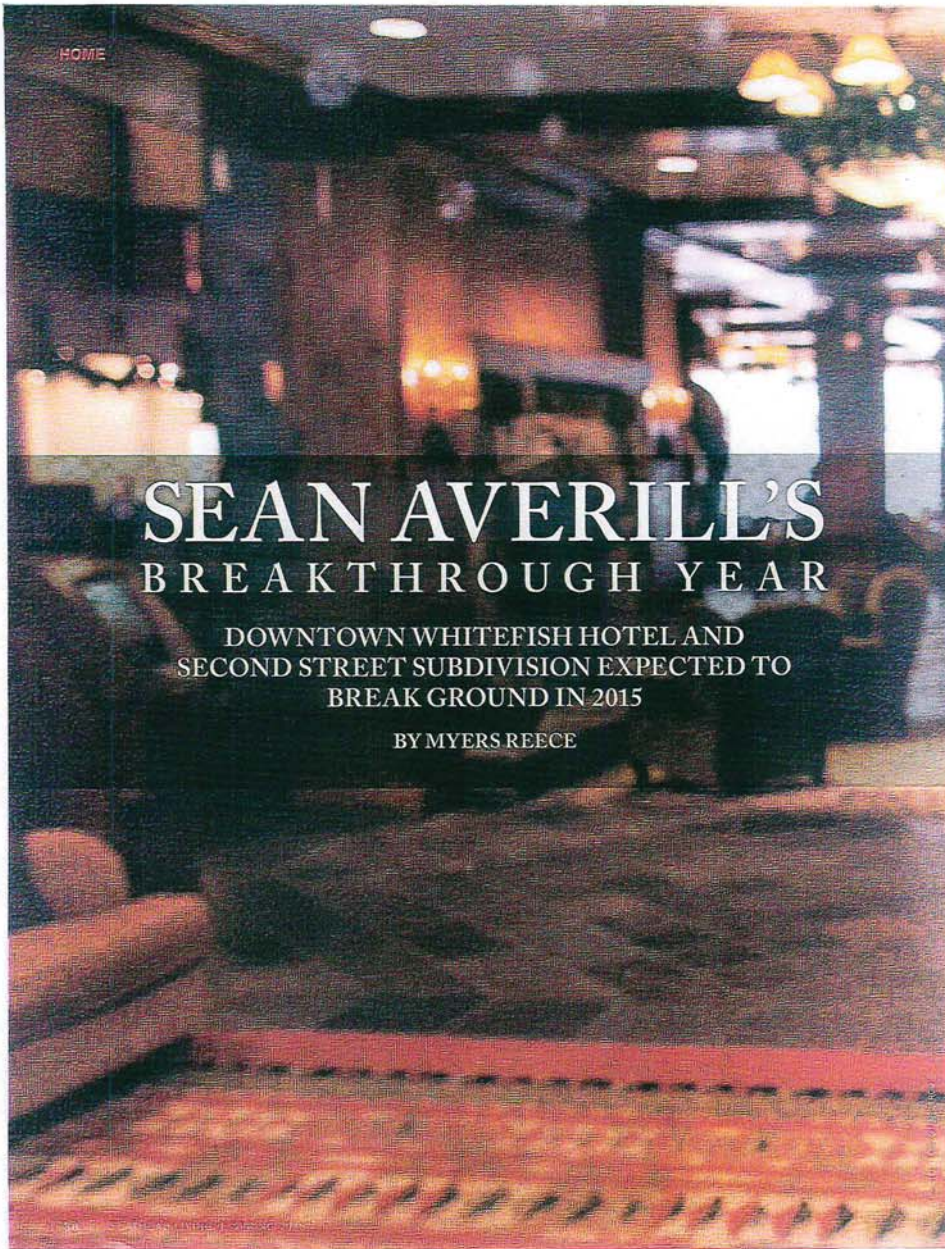


HOME

SEAN AVERILL'S BREAKTHROUGH YEAR

DOWNTOWN WHITEFISH HOTEL AND
SECOND STREET SUBDIVISION EXPECTED TO
BREAK GROUND IN 2015

BY MYERS REECE







ABOVE A rendering of a proposed boutique hotel in downtown Whitefish.

Sean Averill's big year kicks off with a busy spring, as he begins moving dirt on two major development projects in Whitefish: a 62-lot subdivision and an 89-room downtown hotel. His third proposal, an apartment complex, may be waiting in the wings.

Averill, whose family owns and operates The Lodge at Whitefish Lake, has long been involved in the real estate industry, though the 38-year-old's development experience has mostly been limited to his role with The Lodge and its accompanying Viking Creek project, a multi-phase development across Wisconsin Avenue consisting of another lodge, luxury cabins and a 30-acre nature reserve protected through a conservation easement. The Averills also own Trails West Real Estate.

But an active year of planning in 2014 has set the stage for a breakthrough development year for Averill in 2015. He plans to break ground in May on a long-awaited downtown hotel, which will be located on the empty piece of property known as Lot 46 at the corner of Spokane Avenue and Second

Street. Averill is the hotel's owner.

Crews are also set this spring to begin implementing infrastructure on Averill's subdivision, situated off Wild Rose Lane and East Second Street across from Second Street's intersection with Armory Road. Averill owns the land, which is mostly open field.

Averill is trying to get an apartment project approved as well, though it has faced heavy scrutiny from residents skeptical of high-density housing complexes. Averill says his projects seek to address two of Whitefish's top priorities: affordable housing and a hotel in the city core.

"People have been talking about a downtown hotel for a long time," Averill says. "And there's a huge need for affordable housing here. It's the city's biggest priority."

The city has long been interested in a downtown boutique hotel and identified its importance in a 2006 downtown master plan. The Averill family had previously looked into building a hotel at two different spots along Central Avenue, on the corners of First and Third Streets. But those

ILLUSTRATION BY SPARKS+BERNARDI; DESIGN: THE TRISTAR GROUP; PHOTO: JEFF PETERSON

proposals never got off the ground.

In June 2013, developer Orlan Sorensen proposed building an \$11.9 million hotel on the corner of East Second Street and Spokane Avenue but failed to procure funding. The Averills secured a contract to purchase Lot 46 and Sean took the reins on formulating a hotel proposal. Funding has been lined up.

Neighbors and other residents raised concerns about a hotel's impact on parking, traffic and the downtown core's historic character. Averill modified plans to allay some of the worries, and the Whitefish planning board and city council implemented a host of conditions to further address concerns.

On Feb. 2, the city council unanimously approved the project 5-0 with recommended conditions, which deal with parking, traffic, storm water drainage and more, including a prohibition against franchising. The hotel will offer 67 parking spots, and Averill says its design will fit into the surroundings.

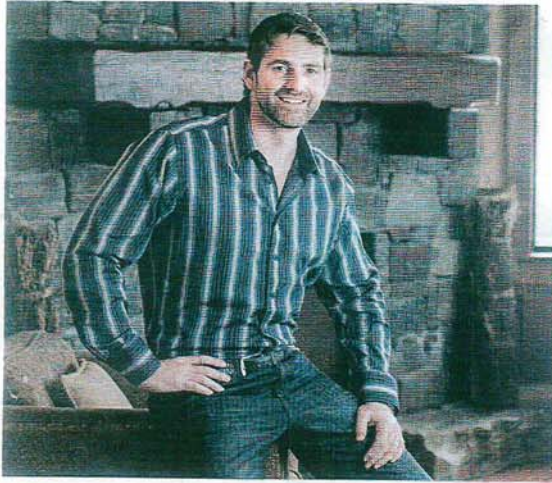
"We want to make it look like it's been there for 50 years, like a historical landmark," he says.

Last June, the city council unanimously approved Averill's Second Street residential subdivision. The proposal was a scaled-down version of previous iterations that had come under fire from neighbors. Earlier versions had proposed 174 units, then 150 and then 143, though the outcry remained strong enough that Averill and partner Will MacDonald shelved the project in September 2013.

Much of the community pushback was in response to the project's apartment stipulations. The majority of the units in the earlier proposals were apartments, and residents worried about density and public safety issues.

The smaller version adopted by council has vastly reduced both density and the potential for apartment space, with 62 lots divided into 54 single-family lots and eight townhouse lots on 23.78 acres of land. Averill and MacDonald have set aside land for a Whitefish Lake Institute nature preserve, similar to the conservation easement arrangement at Viking Creek. Averill expects to begin building roads this spring.

Averill's one proposal that hasn't yet



received approval is a 60-unit apartment project off of U.S. Highway 93 behind the Organic Dry Cleaner. It would consist of five buildings with 12 units apiece, ranging from one to three bedrooms each.

Residents' concerns echo the density and safety worries associated with Averill's earlier apartment-heavy Second Street proposals. But Averill says he's trying to provide for the numerous workers who can't afford housing in Whitefish and have to live in Kalispell and Columbia Falls.

"We're looking at affordable but quality," he says. "You would want to live there."

Averill and his family are also celebrating the 10th anniversary of The Lodge at Whitefish Lake. Sean and his brother Brian opened the hotel with their father Dan in 2005.

"It struggled the first few years," Averill says of The Lodge. "But it turned around. We're happy. It's been a fun ride." ■

Sean Averill, pictured at The Lodge at Whitefish Lake.

