

In Norfolk, how do you build a better block? Pop-up shops.

NORFOLK

Pop-up shops and art galleries will transform Granby Street north of Brambleton Avenue into a lively district this weekend.

At the end of what's called Better Block, everything comes down with the hope that visitors will miss the excitement so much, they'll want it back permanently.

A group of artists and young professionals is planning to stay. They want to use the space at 806 Granby St., previously Quality Furniture Co., for art studios called Alchemy NFK.

They'll display art and host skateboard demonstrations during the Better Block Project this weekend, when the public is invited to see what this block on Granby might look like if it were an arts district.

Careyann Weinberg, 30, operations manager at Grow, a digital advertising agency in Norfolk, is helping lead plans to turn 806 Granby into a cooperative.

"Having a good art scene – it's good for the community. It kind of brings people out and about," she said. "There's a group of us that is willing to put forward everything we can to make it happen."

Led by Dallas-based consultant Better Block, about 130 volunteers began work Tuesday in preparation for Friday and Saturday, when Granby from Olney Road to Addison Street will become a strip that's easy to walk and bike, with outdoor cafe seating and live music.

At 806 Granby on Wednesday, artists worked on projects, cleaned the front windows and brought art into the building.

The stretch was once known as "auto row," and before it was a furniture store, 806 Granby was an auto dealership with a display room.

The display room could become rentable studio space for artists, maybe with a cafe. The back, with a grungy, warehouse feel, is to be used for band practice studios, an audio/video production studio, screen print shop and eventually a recording studio.

Charles Rasputin, 33, a Norfolk artist helping plan the project, ate his breakfast in the building Wednesday and by afternoon was sweating following a day of hard work.

He said the city hasn't always welcomed an idea like Alchemy NFK. But because coordinators have worked with the city, "We're finally being able to embrace it together."

Chesapeake artist Brian Booth spent the day at his job but went home after work to get about eight of his paintings for display this weekend.

“Once Better Block is done and this is over, then we collectively come together and make it happen,” he said of the plan for studio space on Granby.

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