

Officials cautious about building offer

Written by SARAH McCRAW
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More questions remain than just who is paying for proposed Village Hall

Nearly 30 residents attended a public meeting Saturday to learn about Mike and John Ansay's plans to pay for a 4,500-square-foot Belgium Village Hall to be built west of the Luxembourg American Cultural Center.

The Village Hall would be part of a village square development with business buildings and apartments built on approximately 2.25 acres of land donated by the Ansays.

The new hall and the surrounding buildings would feature Luxembourg-style architecture to match the Cultural Center.



"That's a rendering of what we presented to the Grand Duke in Luxembourg because our goal would be to have the square named after him. That would continue to build the relationship between the country and the community," said Mike Ansay, who added that he and his brother would only be involved with designing the building.

"The rest of it is up to the village and the community to decide how they want it on the inside."

The Ansays, who grew up in Belgium, are donating an additional \$200,000 toward the village square development. They said they hope the donation will motivate organizations and businesses to set up shop in the village.

"This is a commitment on our behalf to help jump start the community again," Mike Ansay said.

Village President Richard Howells said the 4,500-square-foot Village Hall would have plenty of office space and two fire-proof vaults for archiving. It would be three times larger than the current hall at 195 Commerce St., which was built in the early 1970s. He said there is also room for expansion in the future.

"Will this make the Village of Belgium boom tomorrow? No. But you always have to start with a spark, and I see this as a spark," Howells said.

But trustees agreed that there were too many questions for board members to make a decision on how the donation should be handled.

"It's great that the village is getting this \$600,000 building, but once it's up can we afford it? Have we projected a cost of operating a building that size?" Trustee Jason Acevedo asked. "It would be nice to know what those costs are (going to be) before we sign and say we're in for

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the \$600,000 and we can't turn this truck around."

Acevedo said there are several options for what to do with the current hall such as donating it to the fire department or allowing the Town of Belgium to use the space.

Howells said the village offered the town office space in the new building, but that idea is something not all board members agree with.

"I for one would oppose that," Trustee Vickie Boehnlein said. "I do not think that is a wise decision. I think in my opinion it just adds a layer of complication."

Town residents gathered Monday to discuss the invitation of office space at the new Village Hall and were also cautious of a combined use.

"In my opinion the town should not be in a joint venture with the village. We are in a joint venture with the fire department and that's enough," Sup. William Janesheck said.

Town Chairman Tom Winker said the town has four options: share office space at the new Village Hall; move into the old hall; stay in their current building at 814 Main St. or build a new Town Hall.

Residents said they want to know more about the suggested alternatives.

Both the town and village said they see how the proposed village square could generate revenue for Belgium, noting that the development would be in a tax increment financing district that ends in 2022.

"We want some growth over there so that when the TIF ends we see that (revenue). Right now the industrial area is not doing much," Acevedo said.

Boehnlein said, "Right now there's no amount of money coming in because it's empty. It's just fields. So right now it's doing the village no good sitting the way it is."

Village officials said they do not want to hold a referendum on the Village Hall.

"We think if this comes to a referendum, people that don't know enough about it are going to say 'No, we don't want that' and then a good thing is going to go by the wayside," Acevedo said.

Trustees said it's important that all aspects of the project are discussed before a decision is made.

"I can't think of any reason right now of why we would turn this down. But before we say yes and jump in, I want to make sure we do this right," Boehnlein said. "I don't want it to be a blemish

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on the community,”

Acevedo said, “We need to compile a list of questions that the board can sit down and figure out.

“Once we figure out the answers to those questions, I suggest that we have another meeting. We explain those answers to you (residents), we tell you exactly what’s going to go on and we’ll get your input on it.”

A village square committee was formed, Boehnlein said, in order to gather questions and information on the plans.

The committee intends to send a survey to residents with the next round of water bills.

The committee would like to have another public meeting in mid-April or early May.

Residents can e-mail their questions on the project to newbelgiumhall@gmail.com.

Image Information: A CONCEPTUAL RENDERING of the Village Hall being proposed by Mike and John Ansay as part of the New Luxembourg development.