Written by Mark Jaeger
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Stone farmhouse to be incorporated into design of Five Corners funeral home

Eernisse Funeral Home has announced plans to build a new facility in the Town of Cedarburg, a move that will give the business a presence in three Ozaukee County communities.

A key element of the proposed building will be stone farmhouse that dates to 1852, which will be incorporated into the design.

“This is something we have been thinking about for some time, and it all came together last week,” said Marc Eernisse, funeral home president.

The funeral home is buying two acres about a half mile south of Five Corners from the Town of Cedarburg. The town approved the land deal last week for $240,000.

The town held the land to control what kind of development occurs in the key commercial corridor. Although the site has business zoning, the town is expected to act on the required conditional-use permit at a Feb. 24 meeting.

With the Plan Commission’s backing, the Town Board could act on the permit as soon as March 3.

If those approvals fall into place, the town anticipates closing on the sale by the end of March.

Town Administrator Jim Culotta said the community acquired the land in 2007 to promote economic development in the Five Corners Business District.

“I’m excited about this proposed development and believe a funeral home is an ideal fit for this particular property,” Culotta said.

“Not only would this project achieve the town’s economic goal, but it would also preserve the historic farmhouse and incorporate many of its architectural elements

into the new addition."

Eernisse said the vintage farmhouse will be surrounded by an additional 8,000 square feet of building.

"It should fit in very well with the historic emphasis that is so strong in the town and the city of Cedarburg," he said.

Assuming the business gets the required approvals from the town, Eernisse said construction will begin as soon as the frost is out of the ground. Completion should be by the end of the year.

Eernisse runs two funeral homes now, in Port Washington and Belgium.

"The Cedarburg facility will be about the same size as the one we have in Port," he said.

Two features will set it aside from the business' existing homes.

One will be a large community room able to seat 100 people, allowing families that want to host a reception following funeral services. Food-preparation facilities will not be
part of the reception room, but caterers will be welcome to bring in food.

The new building will also include a crematory, which will allow on-site cremation of remains.

Plans show parking for 90 vehicles on the site.

The decision to expand into Cedarburg was a natural one for Eernisse, who grew up in the community.

"I graduated from Cedarburg High School and am still an honorary member of the fire department. I have a lot of family living in the Cedarburg and Grafton areas," he said.

"There has been a lot of interest from people in the area who wanted us to expand into Cedarburg. We already handle quite a few services for people from that area."

His roots are also deep in Port Washington, where he served as fire chief for 22 years, retiring in 2004.

Eernisse started in the funeral profession in 1970 with Harder Funeral Home in Milwaukee.

He purchased the Horn Funeral Home in Port Washington and started Horn-Eernisse Funeral Home in 1975 at the corner of Milwaukee Street and Grand Avenue. Then, he
purchased the Junger Funeral Home in Dacada in 1976.

The funeral home built a 10,000-square-foot facility on Port's west side, at the intersection of highway 33 and LL, in 1986.

It built a 6,800-square-foot facility at the intersection of Highway D and Royal Avenue in Belgium in 1998.

Today, Eernisse's children Jill Eernisse Kissinger and Joe Eernisse work alongside him as licensed funeral directors.

Kissinger took over management of the funeral home's Belgium facility, built in 1998. She worked with funeral homes in the Milwaukee area while studying at Milwaukee Area
Technical College, and was licensed in 1997.

Joe Eernisse completed studies at Worsham College of Mortuary Science in Wheeling, Ill in 1995.

He serves on the board of directors of the Wisconsin Funeral Directors Association.

A 19TH CENTURY farmhouse will set the architectural tone for a facility Eernisse Funeral Home hopes to build on Washington Avenue in the Town of Cedarburg.