

Residential units may join businesses at Village Center

Written by Steve Ostermann
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Firm wants to add housing to commercial, office space in Washington Street complex

The Village Center may soon join the list of housing options in downtown Grafton.

The Plan Commission last month reviewed a concept plan calling for the use of the second floors of both Village Center buildings, 1206 and 1218 Washington St., by residential as well as commercial tenants.

The center, a cornerstone of Grafton's downtown redevelopment projects, includes a 22,000-square-foot building facing Washington Street and a 14,000-square-foot building facing 12th Avenue. Both buildings currently have a mix of retail and office space allowed as part of a planned unit development.

First-floor tenants include Grafton Ski & Cyclery, Vino 100, Sweet Trio, Alterra Coffee Roasters, Badger Optical and A-Nails. However, most of the second-floor space has been vacant since the center opened in 2006.

The center is currently held in receivership by Community Bank & Trust of Sheboygan.

Fred Bersch of Siegel-Gallagher, a real-estate brokerage firm looking to buy part of the property, told the commission on Aug. 24 that adding a residential option could help attract more tenants and make the center more economically productive.

Bersch proposed dividing the second floor of each building into two units, with either space available for residential or commercial use. Because the larger building has eight underground parking spaces, it's more likely the residential units would be there, he said.

Village Planning Director Mike Rambousek said the concept plan calls for dividing the second floor of the largest building into units of 2,891 and 4,351 square feet and the 12th Avenue building into units of 3,680 and 1,031 square feet. Each division would also create areas shared by tenants.

In recent months, village officials have grappled with downtown parking problems, including complaints about congestion and proposed restrictions at and near the Village Center.

However, in a report to the commission, Rambousek said allowing residential units in the largest center building "would have nominal impact on parking in this commercial district."

Rambousek said he and his staff preferred having second-floor units in the 12th Avenue building converted to residential use as well.

Commission members took no action on Siegel-Gallagher's proposal, which would require the village to amend the planned unit development. That process would begin with Siegel-Gallagher petitioning the commission for a zoning change.

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Commission member Mark Paschke said adding the residential option would be an appropriate use in the buildings.

Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said the village is willing to work with developers to make the center more economically viable.

“In light of the lack of second-floor tenants, the hope is that this proposed use will result in a successful build-out of the center,” Hofland said.