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## Long-awaited redevelopment project for downtown landmark gets closer look by Plan Commission

Redevelopment plans for the Grafton Hotel, a much-discussed centerpiece of downtown revitalization efforts, were scheduled for review this week by village officials.

The Plan Commission was expected Tuesday night to discuss a proposal that calls for a Cedarburg-based investment group to buy the long-vacant building at 1312 Wisconsin Ave. and restore, expand and convert it into a multiuse structure that would house 19 apartment units and a commercial tenant.

The village's Community Development Authority owns the hotel but has an accepted offer to sell it to Mueller Hotel LLC.

Mueller Hotel representatives have unveiled plans to restore the interior and exterior of the 19th-century, three-story building and construct an addition to the south end of the structure.

In a report to the commission, Village Planning Director Mike Rambousek praised the proposed restoration.

"Overall, the staff believes the architect has done an amazing job with the design of the building that deeply respects the past and at the same time modernizes the building for the future," Rambousek said.

The Grafton Hotel has a long history as a popular dining and lodging establishment but has been vacant for several years. Concerned about the building's deteriorating condition, the CDA this year agreed to buy the property for $425,000 from Grafton Hotel Development,
a company headed by developer Rob Ruvin.

Ruvin bought the property in 2006 but was unable to complete redevelopment plans or secure tenants.

Plans call for the CDA to resell the building to Mueller Hotel for $425,000 as part of a redevelopment agreement.

Under terms of the deal, Mueller Hotel will receive a $360,000 development incentive from the village. In return, the firm must complete renovation and expansion plans that will guarantee a property value of $1.6 million by Jan. 1, 2011.

The CDA has agreed to finance $200,000 of the purchase price through an eight-year loan.

Based on village assessments, the property is currently valued at $496,382.

Mueller Hotel is also required to have the property rezoned and building plans approved by the end of this year, complete exterior restoration work by August 2010 and secure an occupancy permit by October 2010.

Redevelopment plans submitted by Mueller Hotel representatives Paul Rushing and Jim Reed call for the 10,050-square-foot building to house a commercial tenant and seven apartments on its first floor, which has traditionally been used as a restaurant.

The second and third floors of the existing building and addition would house the rest of the apartments, most of which will be two-story units. A 31-space parking lot is proposed on the south side of the addition.

Exterior work is designed to restore the original appearance of the building, which dates to 1892. The proposed addition calls for the use of renaissance stone and cream-colored brick as an extension of the original building.

Rushing told village officials his firm plans to restore many of the building's historic details, including reconstructing a turret over the original front entrance on the north side.

Rushing said plans also include the possible use of "green" elements such as geothermal heating and cooling and solar power in the building.

On Nov. 12, the village's Architectural Review Board approved architectural plans for the project subject to some changes.

Pending a favorable review from the Plan Commission this week, the project will go to a public hearing Dec. 22 on a proposed rezoning of the property from central

business district to planned unit development.

The commission would then consider approving the rezoning and redevelopment plans.

In addition to Rambousek, other village officials have touted the redevelopment plans as a long-overdue and much-welcome step in downtown revitalization.

“With its prominent location adjacent to the Paramount Plaza, this project was critical to the overall success of the downtown redevelopment project,” Village President Jim Brunnquell said when Mueller Hotel unveiled its proposal in September.