

Village refines plan for former lumberyard

Written by Steve Ostermann
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Redevelopment blueprint calls for commercial, residential projects that would add \$8.5 million to downtown tax base

Village of Grafton officials are fine-tuning a master plan to redevelop a former downtown lumberyard for commercial and residential use.

The Plan Commission on Tuesday recommended approval of an amended plan that calls for the 5.7-acre site to have seven commercial buildings totaling 32,600 square feet and four multifamily residential buildings with 84 total units.

According to the plan, which has also been endorsed by the Community Development Authority, the redevelopment projects are expected to add \$8.5 million to equalized tax valuation in the downtown during the next five years.

The total includes \$5.3 million in additional value for the residential phase and \$3.6 million for the commercial projects.

The site — which is bordered on the east by Wisconsin Avenue, on the north by Beech Street, on the west by the Canadian National Railroad right-of-way and on the south by a Cary Apartments complex — is included in a downtown master plan adopted by the village in 1998.

However, officials began sharpening their focus on potential new uses for the site early last year to create a blueprint that would spark redevelopment, Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said.

“At this point, it is the largest undeveloped site in the downtown,” Hofland said. “It’s anticipated the new plan will provide developers with a more detailed look at what the village envisions and help the village’s planning and development staff market the site.”

In a report to the Plan Commission, Village Planner Mike Rambousek called the site crucial “to the success of downtown redevelopment both aesthetically and critically.”

As part of the redevelopment effort, the village is poised to purchase the former Moose’s Service, 1435 Wisconsin Ave., for \$415,000. Hofland said a deal to buy

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the half-acre property from owner Roger Musbach is expected to be closed Friday, April 30.

The CDA has been negotiating with Musbach since February to acquire the property, which would be used to provide the main access road to the lumberyard site.

Plans call for the Moose's store and two other smaller buildings to be razed this summer, Hofland said.

According to the master plan, the site consists of 17 parcels that had a combined equalized value of \$2.3 million in 2009 in the village's downtown tax incremental financing district.

Most of the parcels are owned by developer Robert Zellmer. However, the ownership of much of the land is expected to change because mortgage holders have filed offers on Zellmer's parcels through a foreclosure action.

"It is expected that a series of property owners will partner with the village to redevelop the property," Hofland said.

Although there are water and sewer mains on the north and east sides of the former lumberyard, no other public improvements have been made to the area. Hofland said the village — which owns five parcels in the site — may pay for some utility work to handle stormwater runoff, but the cost of other improvements is expected to be borne by developers.

Plans call for commercial buildings to be constructed along Wisconsin Avenue, including a mix of office and retail uses, with residential buildings erected to the west. The commercial buildings are expected to have minimal or no setbacks from the street, creating "a hard edge" appearance, Hofland said.

"The type of commercial development planned along Wisconsin Avenue is expected to be pedestrian-oriented," he said.

Parking plans for the residential buildings call for 95 surface spaces plus underground spaces. Parking for the commercial buildings would include 127 on-site spaces and 18 on-street spaces.

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Hofland said there are no pending developments for the lumberyard site, “but the hope is for the master plan to promote further interest.”

The Village Board is scheduled to consider a resolution amending the redevelopment plan at its Monday, May 3, meeting.