

Humane Society shelter wins backing

Written by Mark Jaeger

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Village officials told construction of animal center should start in spring

A revised building plan for an animal shelter and education center to be operated by the Wisconsin Humane Society won a resounding endorsement last week during a joint meeting of the Village of Saukville's Plan Commission and Community Development Authority.

According to Tim Hansmann, of Kubala Washatko Architects in Cedarburg, plans for the Wisconsin Humane Society's Ozaukee Humane Society Victoria Wellens Center have been downsized and with fewer "green" elements.

The shelter will replace the renovated outdoor theater concession stand in the Town of Grafton which has been used as a local animal shelter since 1988. It will be named for the Society's late executive director.

Wellens, who led the Humane Society for 15 years, made the initial pitch to Saukville officials for the center last year. She died in March.

Plans originally called for the construction of a 30,000-square-foot building at the northwest corner of Dekora Woods Boulevard and Highway 33, across from the Saukville Post Office.

The latest rendition, is a single-story, 21,150-square-foot building.

The wood and masonry building will be oriented toward Highway 33, but access to the property will be from a drive on Dekora Woods Boulevard.

"We want to make it a welcoming building, so the design breaks up the south wall with several different roof lines," Hansmann said.

Humane Society President Tony Enea said the revised plans indicate a change in thinking on the appearance of the regional animal center.

"We were never in love with the original design. After reviewing that design, we knew we wanted to go in another direction. The new design is smaller and we are really excited about the plan," Enea said.

One of the most notable changes is the elimination of a proposed "green" roof, which was to be partially covered with vegetation.

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“Including a green roof was a little bit of a tougher sell, because of the supports needed to handle the additional weight,” Hansmann said.

The design continues to offer features that place an emphasis on environmental sustainability, including the use of solar panels, in hopes of meeting LEED Silver standards. The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program has been developed by the U.S.

Green Building Council to promote the construction of energy-efficient buildings.

Attention is also being given to ensuring the building and related parking area fits in with the green space that dominates the three-acre site.

A wetlands runs across the north side of the parcel, which will be accessed through a low-intensity trail for walking dogs.

Special attention will also be given to drainage from the site to protect the wetlands. The engineering is being done by R.A. Smith of Brookfield.

“I think we looked at that five different ways,” Hansmann said.

A spacious lobby will give the public access to classrooms and individual animal adoption areas. Holding areas for cats and dogs, an internal veterinary clinic with surgical facilities and administrative offices will be less accessible.

The shelter will have a staff of 100 employees, supported by more than 100 volunteers. Because the animals will need ongoing care, it will be open seven days a week.

The Humane Society offered educational programs to an estimated 7,600 youngsters last year.

The Grafton facility handles between 1,300 and 2,000 animals a year, with as many as 150 on site at any given time.

During the site review, Village President Barb Dickmann said the new center is sure to lead to a surge in interest and use.

“I’m quite sure your business will increase and there will be more people who find you in this new location,” Dickmann said.

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While village officials were delighted with the building details, an obligatory question was asked about possible noise problems coming from the facility when it is filled with animals.

“The site is wetlands on the north and cannot be developed. I think the highway noise will be more disturbing than the noise from the dogs,” Hansmann said.

With the unanimous backing of the joint committees for the site, lighting, landscaping and operational plans, final plan approval will from the state is expected in January, he said. If no problems arise, construction is expected to start in late March or April.

“We’ll start as soon as weather permits,” Hansmann said.

Fund-raising efforts have already generated \$4.4 million of the needed \$6 million, with a significant portion of the money coming from a single, anonymous lead donor.