

Village steps up downtown redevelopment effort

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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CDA poised to expedite work on former lumberyard site by hiring firm to update master plan, help attract developers

The Village of Grafton is poised to hire an engineering firm to expedite a downtown redevelopment project.

The Community Development Authority was scheduled this week to consider approving a contract with Graef USA, Inc. to update a master plan to redevelop the former lumberyard site and help the village attract potential developers to the property.

The 5.7-acre site — 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 — has been earmarked for a mix of commercial and residential uses.

“It’s the largest site that remains undeveloped in the downtown redevelopment area,” Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said. “Its future tax base is important to support past debt for infrastructure that will serve the property.”

A 2011 master plan calls for commercial redevelopment along Wisconsin Avenue and multifamily housing along Beech Street and on the west side of the property, Hofland said.

Until last fall, most of the land had been owned by the late Robert Zellmer, who planned to redevelop the site but abandoned the project. Most of Zellmer’s parcels were acquired by North Shore Bank through foreclosure.

The CDA has since purchased 2.1 acres for resale to developers and is negotiating to buy an additional 2.2 acres.

Among the parcels the village acquired is property that formerly housed Moose’s Service, a longtime Wisconsin Avenue business. That building was razed in 2010.

Hofland said the village plans to jump-start redevelopment of the former lumberyard site and hopes to have construction on vacant property start by next spring.

“The CDA experienced several years of delays due to the financial difficulties of the previous owner and subsequent foreclosure,” he said. “The CDA is now taking a proactive role in redeveloping the site.”

In a report to the CDA, Village Planning Director Jessica Wolff said Graef proposed to complete a site study, update the master plan and prepare redevelopment strategy for a cost not to exceed \$18,750. The site report would include studies on environmental impact, soils, utilities, transportation and market conditions.

“The completion of these tasks will allow the village to provide necessary information about the

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site to potential developers and clearly communicate the village's expectations," said Wolff, who recommended hiring Graef.

"We will then be in a position to accept detailed proposals from interested parties."

Graef was asked to present a proposal because the firm prepared the master plan, Hofland said.

Pending CDA approval, the village anticipates Graef will complete engineering and planning work by July, followed by contacting prospective developers by the end of summer, rezoning approvals this fall and the sale of property and on-site work in early 2015, Hofland said.

Besides contributing to the municipal tax base, the redevelopment would enhance the downtown with new housing.

"The addition of residential units will provide another customer base for downtown businesses," Hofland said. "New commercial development will also give residents access to more businesses."

The CDA was expected to consider the Graef proposal at its 6:15 p.m. meeting Wednesday, June 4, at Village Hall.