

Agreement offers new life for former bank

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Development plan approved by Port council gives local businessman timeline to buy, renovate building

The Port Washington Common Council on Tuesday signed off on a developer's agreement that provides a timeline for the renovation of the former M&I Bank building in downtown — a move that businessman Gertjan van den Broek said paves the way for him to purchase the dilapidated structure from Port Harbor Investments on Thursday.

It could also end a controversy that has dogged the building since 2007, when Port Harbor Investments bought it and promised a multi-million-dollar, high-end redevelopment that never came to fruition.

The 13-page agreement approved Tuesday outlines the steps that must be taken by van den Broek to renovate the building, which includes the classic bank built in 1910 and the adjoining Businessman's Club.

Van den Broek, who is buying the building through the limited liability corporation Renew Port Holdings, is required to repair the facade of the dilapidated building by May 21.

If by April 30 he secures a lease for a commercial tenant who requires different exterior improvements, he may request an extension, the agreement states.

But if that doesn't occur and the improvements aren't completed by the deadline, the city may require the building to be razed within 45 days, the agreement says.

Ald. Joe Dean questioned that clause, saying the building would then come down in early July.

"We would be razing this building at the height of our tourist season," he said. "That's a little troublesome for me, even though I'm confident it won't come to that."

The city has the option of delaying the work until after the tourist season, City Attorney Eric Eberhardt noted.

The agreement also calls for van den Broek — who has said he envisions a four-phase redevelopment of the building — to submit concept plans to the Plan Commission by September, with the goal of having final plan approval by April 30, 2013.

Construction of the first phase, the creation of three to five apartments on the upper floors of the existing building, or the second phase, the improvement of the commercial storefronts, must be substantially complete by Oct. 1, 2013, the agreement states.

At that time, the threat of the city requiring the building to be demolished will end, the

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agreement states.

But if at least 51% of either phase is not completed by Oct. 1, 2013, the city may require the building to be razed.

However, the agreement refers to the deadlines as benchmarks, saying that both parties agree to make "reasonable accommodation" to the schedule if the market or financing require that the redevelopment proceed in a different manner.

"To me, that's one of the key dates," City Administrator Mark Grams said. "Obviously, these redevelopment plans could change depending on the economy."

The city is also requiring van den Broek to provide a \$60,000 letter of credit.

Once the facade is improved, the letter of credit will be reduced by \$20,000, the agreement states. When the plans and specifications for either phase one or two are approved, it will be reduced by another \$15,000.

The balance will be released on Oct. 1, 2013, if the majority of the improvements for phase one or two is complete, the agreement states.