Written by BILL SCHANEN IV
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# Historical Society wants renovation of Franklin St. building to include second-floor deck, outdoor plaza facing harbor

The renovation of the front of the once derelict bank building in downtown Port Washington has been a focus for city officials, but it was plans for the back of the building that intrigued leaders Tuesday.

The Port Washington Historical Society, which has purchased the southern portion of the former M&I Bank building at 118 N. Franklin St. and intends to create a museum there, plans to renovate the back, or east side, of the 105-year-old building in a way that would capitalize on its proximity to the lakefront and hopefully spark additional efforts to link the harbor to Franklin Street, architect Mike Ehrlich told members of the city's Design Review Board.

"The views from this side of the building are spectacular," Ehrlich said. "We're trying to celebrate what is already there."

Plans call for larger windows on the east side of the building and a cantilevered 15-foot steel and glass deck extending from the second floor. The deck, which would provide an ideal place for the Historical Society to host receptions, would also provide shade to protect museum artifacts on the first floor, Ehrlich said.

"I envision this deck resembling the stern of a ship," he said.

Outside, the Historical Society intends to create a plaza-type area that would feature plantings surrounding a circular, concrete deck accented with a large compass rose.

"The idea is that if you're sitting by the harbor you would see this and think, 'I wonder what that is. I'd really like to check it out,'" Ehrlich said.

The plans, he said, would help achieve the goal of Main Street Inc. and the city to break up the swath of pavement and parking places that separate the harbor and Franklin Street.

"The whole idea is to create this connection between the street and the harbor, which is what Main Street wants," Ehrlich said.

Ehrlich noted that he has been working closely with the Wisconsin State Historical Society to ensure that renovations to both the back and front of the building are as historically accurate as possible. The building is part of the city's historic district, and the Port Washington Historical Society hopes to eventually have the building listed to the National Register of Historic Places, he said.

The Historical Society also hopes that its project will spark additional improvements between Franklin Street and the harbor.

Director of Planning and Development Randy Tetzlaff said Mark “Chico” Poull, who owns Schooner Pub directly to the south of the Historical Society building, is planning renovations to the east side of his bar. Those plans, he said, hinge on the relocation of utilities.

In addition, city plans to redesign the parking lots between the harbor and Franklin Street are in the conceptual stages, Tetzlaff said.

“The Historical Society really wants to see these plans move forward,” Ehrlich said.

The Historical Society building was constructed in 1907 by Henry & Hill and for years was the Business Man’s Club, a gathering place for local businessmen who would play billiards and bowl there. It also was home to a five-and-dime and grocery store before being incorporated into the adjoining bank building.

In 2007, the property was purchased by Port Harbor Investments, which began renovations on the facade but never completed the work. The building fell into disrepair and the city went to court to force the corporation to fix or raze the structure.

The city was on the verge of having the building torn down when Port Washington resident Gertjan van den Broek purchased it.

The Historical Society bought the southern portion of the property earlier this year with an anonymous donation that is also providing funding for the renovations.

Design Review Board members praised the Historical Society’s plans for the building but took no action on them because the board lacked a quorum. The designs will be considered by the Plan Commission Thursday.

Design Review Board members also praised plans for a downtown building at the corner of Franklin and Jackson streets. The former Brewmeister’s Trading Post at 322 N. Franklin St. was recently purchased by Highland Park, Ill., resident Ross Leinweber, whose also owns property in the Town of Belgium, Ehrlich said.

Leinweber is planning to renovate the exterior and interior of the building to create high-end retail space on the first floor and living space on the second floor, Ehrlich said.

“I think the plan looks fantastic,” Public Works Director Rob Vanden Noven said. “It’s great that the owner of the building wants it to look so nice.”