

College backs out of Phoenix Project

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Beloit College students won't be living in new apartments downtown come fall.

College officials said an agreement couldn't be reached with Hendricks Commercial Properties to allow students to live in the Phoenix Project building on Grand Avenue.

The former Wagner's Office Supply building on Grand Avenue was torn down in the fall. The new building is expected to include residential apartments and commercial businesses.

"We entered the process hoping to be able to maintain the current rate we charge students for housing," said Jason Hughes, director of communications and marketing for the college. "We understood that was going to be difficult, but really making that and hitting that figure was important."

Hughes said the college's room rate for next year will be \$4,256.

Hughes said it became clear earlier this week the pricing wouldn't work out. Students were polled during the fall semester, and the college found most were in favor of having an option for downtown housing.

Christina Klawitter, dean of students, said of the students polled, about 150 said they would like to live in the Phoenix Building if it were an option.

"At the time we were looking at about 50 spaces," she said. "We were confident we could fill the space."

Hughes said the college requires freshman through juniors to live in campus housing, and about 90 percent of the students live on campus.

Hughes said the college is still excited about the project, and believes it will help the college going forward by offering professors downtown living, as well as more retail business for students and staff.

"As a place that attracts staff and faculty, we are excited to see what this will become," Hughes said.

Beloit College President Scott Bierman said the college will mostly likely look at other possibilities of student housing in the downtown area in the future.

"The Hendricks Development Group was terrific to work with," Bierman said. "They were innovative and tried hard to make it work, but at the end of the day both they and the college have to be aware of their own interests."

Rob Gerbitz, COO of Hendricks Commercial Properties, said the company anticipated the result as a possibility.

“We designed this building to be an apartment or student housing with hopes student housing would work out,” he said. “We knew that it would be tough.”

He said the building plans won’t change with the decision.

“We know that apartments are in high demand for downtown Beloit,” Gerbitz said. “These are going to be top-of-the-line apartments.”

One change that will occur is building private garages to the back side of the building, Gerbitz said.

The garages were designed into the plan from the beginning. However, if students were to live in the building the garages likely would not have been built.

“The biggest thing was that most students don’t have cars,” he said. “Adding that expense didn’t make a great deal of sense if they were going to live there.”

The garages will be about 60 feet away from the building and run along the back, Gerbitz said. He didn’t know the exact number of garages being built. He said, however, that it will cover most of the apartments. The garages will be enclosed within the structure and will also feature a courtyard-type area.

Meanwhile work continues on the structure, and the first floor concrete and foundation is being finished up. Gerbitz said he expects it to be done within the next couple weeks.

Crews also have been working on building staircases, and the exterior walls are also being worked on off-site.

He said the project remains on schedule for a fall completion. The company is already fielding calls for residents and commercial business. Gerbitz said he hopes to finalize some of the commercial business contracts within the next three months.

