

# VISION BELOIT PARTNERS ARE NOW LOOKING FOR NEW HOME

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Ruffini

BELOIT - The Vision Beloit partners are looking for a new home after it was determined updated plans to the Hotel Goodwin and Velvet Buffalo Cafe project would force the groups to relocate.

The site previously housed Visit Beloit, Downtown Beloit Association and Greater Beloit Economic Development Corporation.

Hendricks Commercial Properties (HCP) executives met with leaders of the three organizations in June to ask all break a lease for the 500 Public Avenue building downtown, the site of the ongoing hotel and restaurant project.

Construction crews ran into issues with water in the basement of the historic property built in the 1930s that would have housed prep kitchens, the hotel's fitness center, housekeeping and office space for the development, forcing HCP to request the three organizations walk away from their previously-agreed upon space in the renovated building.

"It's what happens with old buildings," said HCP CEO Rob Gerbitz. "No one's used that basement in probably 40 years and that's one of the things we ran into. In the meantime, we've been talking about their situation now and bringing (the Vision Beloit partners) back downtown."

Visit Beloit Executive Director Celestino Ruffini said all organizations recognized the need to get the key downtown project completed, and agreed upon looking towards future options - from moving into an additional temporary location, pursuing renovation of a downtown property or building a new facility to house all three organizations along with the Greater Beloit Chamber of Commerce, an agency currently housed in the Irontek facility at the Ironworks campus.

According to GBEDC Executive Director Andrew Janke, the Vision partners are looking at temporary spaces at the former Kerry Ingredients, Fat Wallet and EBates building at 100 East Grand Ave.; in the executive suite at the north end of the Ironworks complex; potentially renovating plus expanding the city-owned Angel Museum property along the city's riverfront; and building a new facility at 200 West Grand Ave., west of the Ironworks campus.

Ruffini stressed no plan had been settled on, noting that now was the time to examine all options before presenting paths ahead at a Visit Beloit board meeting on Sept. 26. Estimated funding would come from a typical construction loan rather than through a donor campaign, Ruffini said.

Building a new structure for all partners would be a priority, Ruffini said, along with settling on a downtown location with space for current and future staff growth, and securing a space capable of hosting programming and public events.

"I am open for ideas that are out there," Ruffini said. "Now is the time to figure this out. Real estate in downtown Beloit is at a premium. It's a different time. There are many cities that wish they had a similar problem."

Gerbitz said the time was right for bringing all ideas forward.

"Now is the time to be having these discussions," Gerbitz said. "Going forward these ideas are all things we've been talking about. Getting the partners into a long-term space is the goal and it's about getting them into a space that has the most visibility to accommodate visitors coming to Beloit. It's an exciting time."

Ruffini said he hopes the effort will take shape later this fall, with a potential solution by the fall of 2019.

"We want to carry on the legacy that Beloit 2020 put together with renovating the 500 Public Avenue space with the original Vision Center," Ruffini said. "That's the philosophy we want to carry forward into a new home."