

VISIT BELOIT UNVEILS RIVERFRONT PLANS

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Rendering provided The above rendering shows the extended riverfront property at 656 Pleasant St. in Beloit that will soon be home to Visit Beloit. The project will be completed in two phases.

BELOIT - Visit Beloit has big plans for its future home along Beloit's riverfront, and the agency wants to share their new digs with Beloit residents once the project is completed.

Visit Beloit staff and planning officials with Angus Young & Associates met with the Beloit City Council earlier this week for a workshop of the proposed redevelopment of 656 Pleasant St., the former Angel Museum and St. Paul's Catholic Church, into Visit Beloit's new offices and an accompanying events space.

Beloit City Council President Regina Dunkin said she felt the meeting went well, and was encouraged by Visit Beloit's plans for the site.

"We are very excited about the opportunity to energize this historic building in partnership with Visit Beloit," Dunkin said. "The council is looking forward to seeing this transformative project move forward and enhance the economic development that is taking place throughout the city."

Visit Beloit has been in a temporary location at the Eclipse Center since last year when changes to the Goodwin Hotel development forced the tourism agency out of its offices at 500 Public Avenue. Earlier this year it was announced Visit Beloit had been selected by the city out of multiple proposals to redevelop the key property along the Rock River.

The project will happen in two phases, according to Visit Beloit Executive Director Celestino Ruffini.

"We are proud that we have the ability to repurpose a historic structure, as well as build a modern complex that blends seamlessly into the riverfront for our organization," Ruffini said. "The project, once completed, will hopefully be something that residents, businesses and visitors will not only appreciate, but be in love with. It's an honor for our organization to step up to the plate and continue the transformation of Beloit's riverfront."

Phase one will renovate the existing church structure to be converted into a 3,120 square-foot event venue capable of seating between 150 and 180 people. Phase two is expected to add a 7,980 square-foot two-story addition to the south of the existing building that would add office space, multiple conference rooms, a pre-function space for the church and storage.

Future uses for the site could range from local, regional and national event hosting to local businesses, clubs and individuals. A large gathering space is also scheduled to be included in the development to allow for outdoor seating and patio space.

According to a presentation given to councilors, financing for the project has been approved through First National Bank & Trust and phase one of the environmental site assessment is complete. The site is also pending surveying by Batterman and Co. Visit Beloit now must embark on the city's permitting process that would include a purchase agreement with the council; certificate of appropriateness from the Beloit Landmarks Commission; and a zoning map amendment from the Beloit Plan Commission, all of which would need to be finalized by the city council.

Acquisition of the site would be immediate following city council approval, followed by construction that would take place "as soon as possible," according to the presentation. Visit Beloit would occupy and use the site for operations once construction allows.

Ruffini said the council will meet in closed session on Oct. 7 to discuss the purchase agreement, with the Landmarks Commission to review the certificate of appropriateness on Oct. 15. A date for the plan to appear before the Plan Commission has not been confirmed, but Ruffini estimated it "more than likely" would take place at the regularly scheduled Nov. 6 meeting. Ruffini added the council could approve the purchase agreement in November at its Nov. 18 meeting.