

County board hears redevelopment plan

By Amy Smith Union lifestyles editor | Posted: Wednesday, June 10, 2015 9:26 am

JEFFERSON — Following the dedication of Jefferson County's new highway shop Tuesday, the board of supervisors learned of a \$37 million redevelopment plan for its old site.

Officials from the City of Jefferson, along with representatives from the proposed college of osteopathic medicine, explained their plan to redevelop the 19.2-acre property with public park space and a combination of residential and mixed-use development.

Speaking on behalf of the city, City Administrator Tim Freitag said the old highway site is key to Jefferson's Downtown and Riverfront Redevelopment Plan, which first was adopted in 2006. Over the past several months, the city has been working with Vandewalle and Associates, of Madison and Milwaukee, to re-envision and update the plan to meet current market trends.

When created in 2006, the redevelopment plan proposed adding a two-story riverfront townhouse, single-family or duplex lots, a riverwalk and a public greenspace with access to the Rock River that would utilize the areas on the site in the floodplain.

According to Jolena Presti, of Vandewalle and Associates, economic trends in the past few years have changed significantly since the plan's inception, in turn altering the firm's approach.

The type of residential — whether it will be rental properties — now ultimately will be based upon the proposed College of Osteopathic Medicine eyed for the north side. Without creation of the medical college, housing would be phased in more slowly.

Mark Lefebvre, consultant for the medical college, spoke as a supporter of the proposal, noting that the revitalization of the city's northern corridor is key to the vision of the college.

“One of the central ideas we talked about with the city ... is to be extremely sensitive to the fact that we didn't want a landlocked college out on the edge of town that is not part and parcel to the growth and vitality of Jefferson itself.”

Lefebvre said about 1,000 people will be on campus every day — both staff and students — and they will need places to live that are near both the campus and the heart of the city. He added that an environment enriched by the natural landscape also is important to the college.

“What you do with your riverfront and how that is expressed is important to the college,” he continued. “We are very enthusiastic about this concept and the integration of this college and this community.

“We're here simply to cheer this project on, just as the city and many of you have cheered the college on,” Lefebvre said.

Lefebvre also updated the county board on the progress of the college.

He noted that at the board's May meeting, the consultants were joined by state Rep. Cody Horlacher, R-Mukwonago, who submitted a budget motion on behalf of the college with the state's Joint Finance Committee. The budget request asks that any funding to the college goes in as a bonding project under buildings, which would take part in the second year of the biennial budget.

Horlacher represents the 33rd Assembly District, which includes Jefferson County in the cities of Fort Atkinson and Jefferson; towns of Hebron, Jefferson, Oakland, Palmyra, Sullivan and a portion of the Town of Koshkonong, and the Villages of Palmyra and Sullivan.

Lefebvre said the motion still is alive and is moving through the legislative process.

"The state budget is going to very important to this because the funders we are talking with are look to leverage a partnership with the state," he added. "So this is a when, not a whether."

Because many medical students are nontraditional students who might be married or have children, county board Supervisor Dwayne Morris asked how many properties are planned as multi-family and how many are proposed rental properties.

"We don't know exactly what the market will bare," Presti said, adding that she, along with Freitag and Wehmeier, recently met with different housing and commercial developers to determine if their vision for the site even is viable.

"What we heard was even without the medical college, one developer thought the market could bear 60 units of rental properties," Presti said.

The plan as drawn includes about 245 units of mixed property types. Though housing is a large piece of the revitalization plan, about one-third of the site will be made up of the public park area, which Presti said could be funded with the help of grants.

In earlier meetings between the city and the Infrastructure Committee, County Administrator Ben Wehmeier noted that the proposed park might be an opportunity to engage in the first municipal/county-managed parks.

Proposed neighborhood and commercial property at the intersection of Puerner and Main streets is another key aspect to the redevelopment of the county site.

In addition to the county highway site, the downtown revitalization plan and expansion focuses on three key locations: 138 W. Candise St., the north gateway, and south gateway.

The city hopes to have final approval of the site plan at its July meeting.

Located on Jefferson's north side, the old highway shop site falls within one of the city's tax incremental financing districts. Funds from Tax Incremental Financing district No. 5 could be utilized to redevelop the land to fit the vision of the city.

It was noted that one significant challenge the site presents, however, is the potential for environmental risks due to the storage of fuel tanks on the site for several decades.

Standards in earlier operation in how oil products were dealt with greatly differ from today's practices, leaving the

quality of the land at the site unknown.

The county has budgeted \$900,000 in cleanup costs for the site, as selling the grounds as is would greatly devalue a potential sale.

County Board Supervisor Dick Schultz asked Tuesday if a commitment officially had been made to the city, as he was under the impression that once cleaned up, the site would be sold in order to recover much of the county's cleanup costs.

Wehmeier noted that no commitments have been made, and the county's goal still is to remedy the site and sell it, whether it be a partnership with the city or to an outside developer.

Also Tuesday, the board updated its Smoke Free Air Act to include prohibiting the use of e-cigarettes and electronic delivery devices within county-owned facilities.