

Arbor Gate Gets Boost

Development Groups Team Up On Todd Drive Project

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By Mike Ivey The Capital Times

The long-awaited redevelopment of the Todd Drive interchange is finally gaining some traction.

A plan to relocate two existing Beltline area businesses -- Allen Kitchen & Bath and Verlo Mattress -- while tearing down a boarded-up apartment complex was approved by the Madison Plan Commission Monday night.

A new 52,000 square-foot building housing both Allen and Verlo would be built next to the existing Sergenian's Floor Covering at 2805 W. Beltline Hwy. A commercial building that formerly housed Midwest Billiards, which relocated to the other side of the Beltline, will be torn down to make room for the new project. The move opens the way for the \$41 million "Arbor Gate" mixed-use development project on the east side of Todd Drive where Verlo currently is located. That proposal from the Mortenson Investment Group and the Baxter family, who own Kayser Ford, has already gained \$3.6 million in city backing.

"This is just the first step," said Brad Hutter, president of MIG. "It's going to start a lot of other dominos falling."

The two parties had previously been pursuing separate projects but decided to team up after Mortenson's plans for the \$22 million Landmark Gate project were scuttled. That project died last year following a new state law that made it more difficult for municipalities to use their power of eminent domain to acquire properties for economic development purposes.

Arbor Gate was initially proposed by the Baxters, featuring a pair of three-story buildings with retail stores on the ground floor and offices above. A hotel also has been discussed for the site.

The new location for Allen and Verlo drew the support of area business owners Monday night, including Gary Johannsen of Johannsen Greenhouses, who noted he was appointed to a Todd Drive economic development committee by former Mayor Sue Bauman.

"This just shows how long this has taken," said Johannsen. "But I'm absolutely thrilled two of our neighbors are staying."

The city has promised financial support from the beginning for projects in the central Beltline area, which has seen some violent crime and is home to the Selective Video adult bookstore, long a sore spot for many neighbors.

The Ripple Apartments at 2810 Todd Drive will be torn down but are not part of the new commercial development. That parcel will be used for surface parking to serve the existing Grand China restaurant, which is losing parking to frontage road improvements.

Hutter also said negotiations were moving forward to acquire Selective Video, pending the store finding a new location.

"That is part and parcel of this whole plan," said Hutter.

Midvale Plaza IZ: The commission Monday night approved some modifications to an affordable housing plan for the Sequoya Commons condominiums to be built above the new library branch at 555 N. Midvale Blvd. Developer Joe Krupp asked for changes to close what he called "an extraordinary gap" between the price of market rate units and units required under the city's inclusionary zoning ordinance.

The new plan provides the same number of IZ units but includes several larger 3-bedroom units as opposed to all 1- and 2-bedroom ones.

"We believe that Mr. Krupp is continuing to meet the intent of the ordinance," said city housing supervisor Hickory Hurie.

In other action Monday night the commission:

Delayed action indefinitely on a rezoning request from Hubert McKenzie to tear down a small vacant home on a 2-acre lot at 2016 Sundstrom St. and build a duplex. Neighbors in the quiet wooded area behind the Alliant Energy Center have opposed the introduction of multi-family housing there.

Moved to its March 5 meeting discussion of changes to the reorganization of the city Department of Planning and Development.

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