

EHartford business to move to Vernon

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By John Kennedy Journal Inquirer |  0 comments

VERNON — The central park area could be getting a whole new look three years from now, when a lending company hopes to move from East Hartford to the downtown Rockville section of town.

"I didn't think I'd ever see anything like this proposal in my entire lifetime," Mayor George F. Apel said, endorsing the project. "This should be the one activity in this town that 100 percent of the people should get behind."

Apel said the project has been in the works since Feb. 1, and John Dilorio, CEO of 1st Alliance Lending, said while he hopes work will begin at the end of 2015, he didn't want to commit to a timetable this early in the planning process.

Dilorio said during a presentation at Tuesday's Town Council meeting that he's committed to the current location at 111 Founders Plaza until 2016, and has projected that when the company moves, its 200 employees will have grown to about 1,100.

The development would stretch from West Main Street to where Market Street once was, opposite of Park Street, ending before the Bank of America buildings. The building itself would be 350,000 square feet, 200,000 of which would be office space on the second and third floors.

Dilorio said his goal is for "mom-and-pop" shops to take up the ground floor, with the pedestrian aspect of the area serving as the centerpiece.

"We don't want to reinvent Rockville — we don't have delusions of grandeur — we want to revitalize it," Dilorio said. "We want to put jobs in downtown Rockville."

The land the development would sit on is owned by at least four property owners and is home to a number of businesses.

Dilorio said he would like to keep any businesses that want to stay, and that the work would be done in phases, so people would be moved around, but not entirely displaced for the duration of construction.

He said that while the priority is helping people out, he knows it won't be completely seamless.

Dilorio said the properties in the area are being appraised, as he wants the development to sit on one parcel owned by his company when it's done. He said that he was not willing to only partially develop, because "we don't do it halfway.

"We're not here to try to steal anything — we'll pay what it's worth," Dilorio said. "We will not be successful here if the community doesn't embrace us."

State Rep. Claire Janowski, D-Vernon, said that while "the idea of that many jobs coming to the community is amazing," the main problem with developing the area has been getting everyone on board.

"We're proceeding well," Dilorio responded.

Raised in western Massachusetts, Dilorio said he was drawn to Vernon because its descent from thriving mill community to what it is today reminded him of his own hometown. He described standing at the top of Fox Hill and looking down on the town, seeing a great opportunity to make a difference.

Though he stressed that the work is preliminary, he hopes the area will exude a feeling of modern times "with the flavor of 1896."

He described a building with lots of glass, a solarium, an auditorium, and an art gallery. He also said he hopes to incorporate the water aspect that once ran through downtown, and to have a lot of green space surrounding the building.

"Blacktop out, green in, is a big part of our plan," Dilorio said, explaining that even the parking lots would not be large swaths of pavement.

He anticipates 1,300 to 1,500 parking spaces, but said the goal is to cover about 1,200 of them by utilizing underground parking. Dilorio also said he anticipates being able to produce 1.6 million kilowatt hours of power completely "off the grid" by utilizing a solar system and geothermal energy.

Apel said there has been no discussion yet about town financial responsibility, and also said that the town's traffic authority and the state Department of Transportation would deal with traffic issues, as Route 74 runs past the front of the proposed development.

Dilorio also addressed traffic concerns, explaining that 1,100 people won't be coming and leaving at the same time. The operation will run from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m., and people will be in and out at different times.