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News

Renaissance meets first deadline; McDonald's agrees to move

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BRISTOL – The Bristol Downtown Development Corp. on Monday gave its approval to the first plan put forth by Renaissance Downtowns, the developer selected to transform the 17-acre former mall site in the center of the city.

Renaissance also reported that the McDonald's eatery on the property has agreed to move to an another site on the property

The Long Island-based Renaissance on Monday submitted its "scope of studies," a lengthy list of objectives for the project, to BDDC board members, meeting its first deadline since being selected as preferred developer.

"It looked to me to be a pretty thorough and comprehensive plan," said BDDC Chairman Frank Johnson. "This more than met my expectations."

Board member Gardner Wright called it "a pretty aggressive project."

The document outlines analysis and studies that Renaissance intends to do on a wide variety of aspects related to the project, such as planning, market feasibility, economic impacts, environmental studies, job creation, design, engineering, traffic, parking and more.

Market research and feasibility, said board member Tom Barnes, will be crucial.

Board member John Lodovico said Renaissance did "an outstanding job" with the scope of studies.

Tom Cosgrove, also on the BDDC board, said he's happy to help Renaissance sell the project to potential tenants.

Ryan Porter, project manager for Renaissance, said he's already getting calls from brokers and potential tenants about the property. He said they've been more oriented toward strip malls than he would like, but

that he's glad excitement is building. Inside support from Cosgrove and others will help, he said.

Once word is out what Renaissance plans to do, outsiders who may not have considered it will be drawn in, Porter said.

"We're going to draw some really great attention to Bristol as a city," Porter said.

Board members recommended approval and sent the document on to city councilors for their review.

Porter also updated the board about what he'd done since the city approved his company.

He's in discussions with McDonald's Restaurant, Porter said, calling the fast food eatery "a very, very important part of this project."

Porter said McDonald's has agreed to move to an alternate site on the property — he said it may be a "land swap" — but said much depends on details that have yet to be resolved, including the building type that a new McDonald's would have.

Discussions with Dunkin' Donuts will come soon, Porter said.

Rail will be important to the project, said Porter, whether it is a line going toward Hartford or simply towards Waterbury.

A new Renaissance office will open July 1 at City Hall or shortly thereafter, said Porter. He said it will be open at least 15 hours a week, and probably more.

By mid-July, Porter said, he'll hold a meeting of downtown private property owners to talk about their role in the project. He said it will be more successful if it is not limited to the 17 acres now owned by the city.

Lodovico said he likes the idea of getting as many people from the outside involved as possible.

"That's key," he said.

A website dedicated to the project should be online by August 1, said Porter, who said it is in design now.

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