

Public-private partnership explored to move Job Center to Sun Plaza

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Forging a public-private partnership with Bear Development to renovate a building in Sun Plaza for housing Kenosha County Human Services offices and the county Job Center is being explored.

The partnership would allow S.R. Mills of Bear Development to apply for cost-saving tax credits the county would not otherwise qualify for. Bear Development would build out the Sun Plaza space off 52nd Street to suit the needs of the county, which would eventually take over ownership.

New market credits and solar tax credits from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation are among the tax credits Mills said would be explored.

It's a similar arrangement that made possible the relocation last year of Kenosha Human Development Services to Sun Plaza, Mills said Tuesday at an informal public presentation at KHDS, 3536 52nd St.

Mills added that he's also prepared to buy the existing Human Services/Job Center building at 8600 Sheridan Road, should that opportunity arise.

"It's an idea at this point," Mills said of the relocation option being explored, as the existing Human Services/Job Center building is in need of approximately \$14 million in repairs. "We're looking to slowly go through the steps to vet it out and see if it is an opportunity that would work for the county, the city and the neighborhood."

Kenosha County Supervisor Andy Berg, whose district encompasses the Sun Plaza property, said the county is seeking feedback "to make sure we have a project and a development that is beneficial to the community."



Mills said there are 63,000 existing square feet at the Sun Plaza location and room for a 69,000-square-foot addition, for a total of 132,000 square feet. The current Sheridan Road complex is approximately 100,000 square feet.

Of the potential 132,000 square feet at Sun Plaza, 25,000 would be unoccupied, Mills said. Cameron Swallow of the Kenosha County Food Bank said that organization is looking for warehousing space and is interested in working with the county to share the location.

Architectural renderings supplied by Partners in Design Architects show a reconfigured building with a diagonal entrance in the corner of the existing complex.

Several existing tenants of other storefronts in Sun Plaza attended the meetings. Mills said the goal is to ensure they will not be “burdened” and that rent prices remain sustainable.



Three options

The idea of relocating the Job Center to the Uptown area failed to gain County Board support in the 2021 budget cycle. It is one of three options being considered for funding as part of the 2022 Budget to address the aging facility off of Sheridan Road, which is more than 50 years old. A facilities assessment determined it needs, at minimum, \$14 million in repairs over the next three to five years.

The three options, and their estimated costs, the County Board will consider are:

Maintain the existing campus as is: \$14 million for repairs.

Enhance the existing campus: \$18 million for repairs and renovation.

Develop alternative campus site at Sun Plaza: \$13-16 million.

According to an executive summary from county administration, relocation is the best option, because it will “simplify client access, improve service delivery, increase efficiency and enhance neighborhood economic development” for the next 25-plus years.

“Additionally, this is the only option that offers several potential financial incentives that would reduce overall project costs,” the summary reads, referencing the tax credits Mills spoke of Tuesday.

The county also plans to conduct tours of the Human Services Campus on Sheridan Road (set for 6:30 p.m., Sept. 22) and the Sun Plaza site (6:30 p.m., Sept. 29), leading up to the 2022 Budget deliberations.

The final option selection will be made as part of the 2022 Budget approval process.