
IN THE NEWS

Burlington friars would remain and would keep many of their artifacts, potential developer says

Story by Scott Williams – The Journal Times

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A developer proposing to redevelop the St. Francis Friary says his project would not displace the property's historic artifacts, or even the friars themselves.

S.R. Mills, president of Bear Development Mills

S.R. Mills, chief executive officer of Bear Real Estate Group, told city officials Tuesday that his company's makeover of the 146-acre religious compound would maintain space for the existing statues, monuments and other treasures.



Even the Franciscan Friars themselves would remain, as the development firm's plans set aside 14 acres where the friars could continue to live while development takes place around them.

"They still want their little enclave," Mills told members of the Burlington City Council and Burlington Plan Commission at a public review of the project.

Some officials voiced support for the Bear Real Estate Group's plan, although no date has been announced for either the Plan Commission or City Council to vote on the project planned at 2457 Browns Lake Drive.

"This is very exciting," Alderman Bob Grandi said.

The Kenosha-based firm proposes to acquire the 146-acre site and transform it into a new residential neighborhood, with 102 new single-family homes and 80 multifamily units for senior citizens and others. The project also would include a commercial site for a business to be determined overlooking Browns Lake Drive.

The St. Francis Friary, which is similar to a monastery, was created in the 1930s as a residence, seminary and retreat for a Catholic order of friars who migrated from northern Wisconsin.



A friary is similar to a monastery, except that monks generally live a reclusive lifestyle, while friars tend to be more outwardly involved and engaged in community service.

The Burlington campus become a popular place for visiting Catholics, as well as a setting for festive community gatherings.

But only about 20 friars still live there, and they have sought a buyer for the property as they have struggled to maintain the place.

If the city approves of the project, Mills told officials that he hopes to complete a purchase of the property by next fall, and then begin construction work almost immediately.

Bear Real Estate Group proposes to convert the main friary building into new multi-family housing for 42 senior citizens. The plans also include 102 new single-family homes and another multi-family property with 38 other units.

Mills estimated that the development would boost the taxable value of the former friary campus by more than \$80 million.

Mills said a chapel would be preserved and possibly opened up for public events, and some statues and other amenities would be relocated to the 14-acre site where the remaining Friars would live.

Acknowledging the property's significance in local history and religion, he said: "It's really cool, and we want to make sure we do a great job with it."

Source: https://journaltimes.com/news/local/burlington-friars-would-remain-and-would-keep-many-of-their-artifacts-potential-developer-says/article_709a203e-219f-5b4f-949b-36b8306747ee.html?utm_campaign=snd-autopilot&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook_The_Journal_Times&fbclid=IwAR29qR-bNf6Qb_l56oxLPOTUuejA16cwCrJVM3hYmUrH7wgQ_7WBS42qpR0