

Boutique hotel looks to add 'rooftop experience'

MAR 23, 2022

CHRIS MORELLI CMORELLI@LOCKHAVEN.COM



IMAGE PROVIDED Following numerous delays, developers hope to begin construction on the Bellefonte Waterfront Project this summer. An artist's rendering shows the proposed hotel and parking garage planned for the location.

BELLEFONTE — A rooftop bar and restaurant could be coming to Bellefonte Borough in the near future.

During Monday's borough council meeting, developer Tom Songer II gave an update on the long-anticipated Bellefonte Waterfront project, which includes a boutique hotel, parking garage, residential condominium, a bar and restaurant.

"Our vision really for this project has not changed," Songer told council. *"We want to do a high quality development of the Bellefonte Waterfront."*

However, Songer said that developers recently came up with the idea for a *"rooftop experience"* on top of the boutique hotel. The borough has a height limit of 65 feet on buildings, but Songer asked that it be increased to 75 feet.

"When you're in this lounge area up on the rooftop, you'll be looking out at a panoramic view of Bellefonte," Songer said. *"That really is the reason why we're requesting a change in the height limit."*

He said that the additional height shouldn't be a problem for the borough.

"We don't really think that the height of these buildings is going to be really out of character with current buildings that exist in Bellefonte," Songer said.

According to Songer, the rooftop would have a lounge with both indoor and outdoor seating, enabling it to be open year round.

"When weather permits, people will be able to sit outside," Songer said.

Council unanimously approved the change in height limitations from 65 feet to 75 feet at the meeting, pending a public hearing and comments from the planning commission.

Another change to the original design is the addition of residential condominiums on the creekside.

“We’re going to have five floors of condominiums over the first floor space, which will be commercial,” Songer said.

The planned 80-room boutique hotel includes a farm-to-table restaurant and banquet and meeting spaces facing Spring Creek and Talleyrand Park. The residential condominium building on the north side of the property will include five floors of one-, two- and three-bedroom condos above the first floor of office and retail space. Between the two buildings will be a 300-space parking garage structure that will also include commercial and retail space on the first floor. In total, the project includes 25,000 square feet of available commercial space along Spring Creek and Dunlap Street.

The condominium space will feature seven condos per floor, Songer said.

“We’re going to have a wide choice. We’ve had a lot of interest in this,” Songer said.

All of the development is slated to take place on the plot of land that used to house the Bush House. The historic Bush House was destroyed by a fire back in 2006. As a result, the prime location along Spring Creek has sat vacant ever since. Songer hopes to break ground on the project this summer or fall, he said.

The project was announced in 2018 and after Bellefonte Waterfront Associates — Songer — officially purchased the property in 2019, the hope was to start construction in the summer of 2020 with plans to open the hotel in the summer of 2021. During Monday night’s meeting, Songer pointed out that COVID-19 and the pandemic got in the way and delayed the project indefinitely.

However, with the country eyeing an end to the pandemic, Songer is hopeful that the hotel, condos, shops, bar and restaurant will pump money into Bellefonte and the Centre Region.

“People are going to come stay at the hotel, they’re going to patronize all the businesses downtown. To us, that’s one of our main goals — to help all the businesses that are here,” Songer said.

The previous update from Songer came during a Feb. 7 borough council meeting. At that time, Songer asked council to consider the proposed Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance Draft Ordinance and District Boundaries in order to help support the project.

Songer said he hopes to break ground on the project soon.

“We’ve got our team in place, we’re working hard to get the design drawings done and get bids in. If everything comes together, hopefully, we’ll start in summer or fall, somewhere in there,” Songer said. *“We really want to get going on this as soon as we can.”*