

Zoning Change Sought for 'Rooftop Experience' at Planned Bellefonte Waterfront Hotel



An artist's rendering shows the rooftop lounge area that is part of the latest plans for the Bellefonte Waterfront Project. After COVID-19 delays, developers hope to begin construction this summer. Image provided

By [Vincent Corso](#) - April 1, 2022

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BELLEFONTE — Imagine sitting outside on one of tallest buildings in Bellefonte, enjoying a drink and a meal with views of the courthouse and the rest of the Victorian town down below. Well, that might be a reality soon as developers for the Bellefonte Waterfront Project — which includes a hotel, condominium and parking garage on the former Bush House site — are looking to add a “rooftop experience” element to the boutique hotel.

Developer Tom Songer brought the updated plans for the long-anticipated project to borough council during a March 21 borough council meeting. Construction is planned to start this summer.

“When you are 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 are requesting the change of the height limit.”

The rooftop would include indoor seating for 100, which would be open year-round. Outdoor seating would be available when the weather is cooperative.

This addition is expected to raise the height of the building to approximately 72 feet, pushing the building beyond the 65-foot height zoning restriction in the Waterfront District.

Council unanimously conditionally agreed to change the height limit to 75-feet, pending a public hearing and feedback from the county’s planning office.

“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.

The boutique hotel will also include a farm-to-table style restaurant on the first floor, facing the waterfront, with outdoor café-style seating.

A ballroom on the second floor will accommodate 250 to 300 guests.

Another change to the project includes adding five stories of residential condominiums on the Spring Creek side of the parking garage, above a first floor of commercial space.

The parking garage is planned to stand between the hotel and the other condominium building.

Songer said the added condominiums on the creek side of the parking garage would provide a “nice visual, aesthetically pleasing experience” as viewed from Water Street.

In February, Songer asked council to consider [a Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance ordinance](#) to support the project. He told the borough that after delays caused by the pandemic, he hoped to have construction start this summer.

The waterfront area has sat vacant ever since the Bush House was destroyed by a fire in 2006. Developers first announced the new project in 2018 and Bellefonte Waterfront Associates had originally hoped to start construction in the summer of 2020 and open the hotel the next year. COVID-19 foiled that plan.

“We are working hard to bring the Bellefonte Waterfront Project to fruition. We are making progress. COVID slowed us down and still is having an impact on the project, as it has on many projects throughout the country,” Songer said in February.

“As you are aware, it is hard to get materials nowadays to build anything. Prices have gone up substantially, but we are still working hard to bring this project out of the ground hopefully this summer.”

Throughout the process, the development team has worked to design the building to fit in with the character of Bellefonte.

Songer said a goal of the project is to help bring people to the area to live and visit and help support the continued growth of the region.

“People are going to stay at the hotel and they are going to patronize all the businesses downtown,” Songer said.

“To us that is one of our main goals – to help the other businesses that are here.”