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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Blocking progress

A proposal to build a four-star Marriott Hotel in downtown Milwaukee deserves support.

Not everything that's old is historic. And not every old building deserves to be saved. Members of the City of Milwaukee's Historic Preservation Commission and the Common Council should keep that in mind as they consider a proposal for a \$50 million privately funded Marriott Hotel on Wisconsin Ave.

Promoters of the proposal say the four-star hotel will create up to 200 permanent jobs and 450 construction jobs and would add about \$2.2 million to the city's annual tax revenues. It also could enhance the region's tourism and marketing efforts, bring more business travelers to downtown and boost downtown development, something downtown certainly could use.

It's a good proposal, and the developers deserve a chance to see if they can make it work.

The Department of City Development supports the project, but Ald. Robert Bauman does not, citing the historic value of the buildings the developer would raze to put up the hotel, the fact that they are in a historic district and his distrust that the proposed project is a real deal. He also says that other essentially empty downtown sites are available for development. But supporters argue that a site on Wisconsin Ave., east of the river,

would be most appealing to business travelers. This hotel is not for conventioners.

The Historic Preservation Commission could have taken action on the proposal recently but instead scheduled a public hearing. Further delay could be fatal to a project such as this.

The hotel would be replacing old buildings that largely sit empty now and are in serious disrepair. They have been worked on over the years; very little of the façade is left of the original buildings. Renovating and repair probably would be too expensive. Broken windows and graffiti mar the buildings, which face Wisconsin Ave. and Milwaukee St.

And here's a developer who wants to raze the buildings and replace them with something that would be productive for the city. And a developer who is not asking for any city money.

There are many buildings that should be saved because of their historic significance and viability. But that does not appear to be the case with these buildings.

The commission would be doing the city a service by approving the proposal as soon as possible. The council also should put its stamp of approval on the project. Good things could happen.

COMMENTS

[jplatteter - Nov 25, 2010 9:12 PM](#)

There is every reason why this project should go ahead and no reason why it should not, so let's stop and wonder why it is that the Alderman is opposed to it when everyone knows the buildings slated for demolition are fully depreciated and of no real value other than the value of the land minus the cost of demolition.

Might the Journal-Sentinel look into who owns those buildings and what relationship, if any, those people or entities have with the Alderman and consider that they might just really be holding out for more money since they'd have to sell to the developer in order for Marriott to go ahead?

Yeah, please look into that for us, will ya?

In the meantime, Mayor Barrett should just instruct the City to issue the construction permits.

[FRS - Nov 25, 2010 9:23 PM](#)

First Bob Bauman blocks Buy Seasons from moving into the valley losing 100's of jobs and now he doesn't want a Marriott hotel, which isn't asking for any economic help, either. Maybe it's time for the voter in this district to think about who they keep electing.

[RedwoodPerch - Nov 26, 2010 1:36 AM](#)

A four star hotel? Who rated it a four star? Marriott? Can a hotel rate themselves or does some other agency conduct ratings?

[RR Ty - Nov 26, 2010 3:33 AM](#)

How tempting to merely dismiss any new hotel by asserting "no one will ever use it." That phrase has echoed despite well-studied predictions about other projects, so why not now, for this hotel scheme, too?

Instead, the 'Net rounders have found a new target to pounce on: the district's alderman.

Is there anyone with actual knowledge? Any expertise to weigh in? Seems to me, the alderman is likely to have actual knowledge and the Marriott developers have some expertise. Maybe they could talk the differences over, without ivory advice and keyboard rattlers just making distracting cacophony.

[Taxidea taxus - Nov 26, 2010 6:55 AM](#)

It seems that Ald. Bauman hasn't been properly bribed. What else could explain this?

Faxus - Nov 26, 2010 8:46 AM

I don't understand why this project isn't moving along, unless another downtown hotel doesn't want the competition?

kingj - Nov 26, 2010 9:01 AM

There is something here which stinks and just is not being revealed. Milwaukee needs more mid grade hotel rooms like it needs another sports complex or convention center or theater. Is it location which would be advantageous for business users that are tied to US Bank and NML? Not like downtown is that hard to navigate or a sprawling universe. When saying it is location, it is akin to saying one or even six blocks closer to the mentioned businesses is vastly superior to existing rooms. It is not. Worse, thinking existing hotels have rooms available most nights. Adding more makes it that much harder for existing to survive. Given they all compete for the same business it is entirely plausible the new hotel will succeed. I give you that. Will it's success come with failure of something already there on another block? If so, we gained nothing. Simply put why no is the correct answer here. The business for MORE rooms does not exist. Simply adding them attracts zero travelers who might use them.

Only reason this could work and not harm is if it draws the value minded from the cheaper outlying hotels. OK. Let them build it with one caveat. No room rents for more than \$60 a night. You may then have a win win concept on our hands. See how fast they flee with their idea if we place this restriction. Could not care less if they do. As Milwaukee, we do have interest in drawing business from hotels not near downtown. Bringing travelers closer to the thing we are trying to revive. We have zero interest in harming existing downtown hotels which is all this sounds like it would do.

wfch17 - Nov 26, 2010 9:42 AM

kingj and and leaders like Bauman are exactly why Milwaukee will continue down its path of abject failure. With that kind of attitude Milwaukee will soon attain the status of number 1. The poorest city in the country. People like Alderman Bauman can point with pride that helped Milwaukee to be number 1.

As far as the loser attitude signified by kingj, Milwaukeeans and their class warfare mayors, Zeidler, Maier, Norquist and Barret, have always fired up the people to believe that anything or any development which is upscale is evil. A city can never have too many hotel rooms. The Marriott corporation is not stupid. If they see a business opportunity here and are willing to invest lots of money to create JOBS for Milwaukeeans, then let them.

Milwaukeeans always are begging upstate taxpayers for bigger and bigger handouts. Here is a chance to help themselves and as usual through bad leadership and civic stupidity they will blow it.

Inspector2211 - Nov 26, 2010 10:20 AM

King Bauman says no. Not in MY backyard. These vacant buildings are too historical.

honesttruth - Nov 26, 2010 10:24 AM

Maybe he would support it if there was a train stop right at the hotel. Mayor Barrett, get on that, please. Have your folly trolley go right to the front door. Choo-Choo!!!!!!
Everything comes from the train, right???????

Mondeaux - Nov 26, 2010 11:20 AM

Would be interesting to know the occupancy rates of other hotels already located in the area. What developer would not put forth the rosy picture that their project is a can't miss situation. Are tourists staying away from downtown because there aren't enough rooms available? I doubt it. Are business travelers not coming because of a lack of rooms? Nope, if they've got business here they'll find a way to get here. Believe it or not the prodevelopment folks have done a good job of shooting themselves in the foot before. Just ask M&I what the source is, of a large part of their loan losses. No need to help them do it again.

the truth 1962 - Nov 26, 2010 12:00 PM

How tempting to merely dismiss any new hotel by asserting "no one will ever use it." That phrase has echoed despite well-studied predictions about other projects, so why not now, for this hotel scheme, too?

I have to laugh. My taxes will not go to this development. Let private investors take the risk.

Big P - Nov 26, 2010 2:30 PM

The days of remodeling these old delapidated buildings are gone. There are too many risks involved,ie lead based paints, asbestos, and such. tear them down and get on with it. More jobs

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Ibister - Nov 26, 2010 10:04 PM

Of what value are "historic" buildings that have lost touch with their history? If the buildings in question had real historic value the owners would have made an effort to maintain them. Much of the facade is no longer there and I believe that's one of the requirements for having historic status in the first place.

The City has an opportunity to rid itself of a blighted area, welcome a new building and business to downtown, and to increase the tax base. This sounds like a win for the City of Milwaukee.

I'm not sure I understand the arguments about whether additional hotel rooms are needed or the potential effect on existing hotels. A private enterprise is proposing to build and operate a hotel. They are placing their capital at risk. Let them make the call.

The City has certain responsibilities but those responsibilities run to things like building codes, making certain that the business is legal, and assuring that the hotel will not be a bigger blight than what it is replacing.

The City is not responsible for the profitability of competing businesses. It is not responsible for assessing the business risk of a private enterprise. It would be different if the developers were seeking public funds. They are not.

Let the developers, their investors and their lenders worry about assessing the business risk. Let the competing hotels worry about whether or not they are going to be competitive in an open market.

In the meantime let the City welcome with open arms a considerable investment in downtown and the creation of new jobs in this stagnant economy.

Longview - Nov 28, 2010 5:50 PM

If the developer and the operator are not asking for public assistance in funding the project you can rest easy that they are pretty darn sure that it is going to be economically viable. And you can bet that they have already given consideration to the "essentially empty downtown sites" that the alderman is worried about.

Unless the Ald. Robert Bauman knows something that the article didn't reveal, why isn't he fast-tracking an undertaking that would put 200 jobs into his district?

If replacing dilapidated buildings with a new hotel, adding 200 permanent private sector jobs, and adding a large chunk to the city's tax base aren't enough to get this project rolling - the fact that it is being done without any contribution from the taxpayers should make it a no brainer.

In Wisconsin's current economic and political climate any private sector venture that isn't trying to feed at the trough of corporate welfare should be encouraged, and applauded.

bravesfan - Nov 28, 2010 8:19 PM

To those who oppose this venue.....

Do you people ever travel? The Marriott chain of hotels are new with updated features, Wireless, workout, etc. The very traveler you want to attract, stay at Marriott chains. They obviously know something that Baumann does not. To tell them that there are other options is ludicrous. They want that location, and I doubt they want to raze your precious historic building because they are petulant. My family (we are very fortunate) travel at least 3 weeks a year. I would NEVER book at a discount hotel because of price. You get what you pay for. The average 3 star hotel in any major city price wise is about 150. There should be no consideration for occupancy rates, as each hotel will price according to business needs. Downtown needs every business they can attract, because it is becoming like St. Louis, empty storefronts and one major mall with empty stores. You want to be like Minneapolis. Tear down these old eye-sore buildings and put up commerce. For pete's sake, we have the lake, the museums and these empty idiotic old buildings that are not being used for anything. I suppose Plankinton Ave. going south, with all those useless warehouse buildings are worth preserving also. 5 years ago Pittsburgh gutted their old useless buildings, built the new stadiums, and now it's awesome. Come on Bob, get in the 21st century.