



City should approve new downtown hotel

Friday, November 26, 2010

The issue: A proposed \$50 million downtown Milwaukee Marriott project that would require the demolition of several historic buildings

Our stance: Milwaukee aldermen should override an expected rejection from the Historic Preservation Commission and approve the project.

In today's tough real estate environment, few new projects are being proposed in the area, especially ones that require no public financing assistance.

That is why it is so surprising to see the Ald. Bob Bauman-led opposition that has delayed a \$50 million Milwaukee Marriott Hotel proposed for the southwest corner of East Wisconsin Avenue and North Milwaukee Street in downtown Milwaukee. To make way for the 10-story hotel, several mid- to late-1800s buildings would need to be demolished.

At a hearing last week, the city's Historic Preservation Commission delayed its expected rejection of the request and instead scheduled a public hearing for December. If the panel votes against the project, the developers will appeal to the Common Council.

The specific buildings are not historic, but are located in a historic district. Project supporters are correct when they argue the buildings are old but not historically significant. A new development that would fit with the area would do much more to reinvigorate the neighborhood and increase traffic on Milwaukee Street.

One look at project's numbers and you can see the good it would do for downtown and the region — 500 permanent and construction jobs, \$2.26 million in tax base, \$450,000 annually in property taxes, \$840,000 a year in sales taxes and no public dollars needed to make the project a reality.

One compromise floated by aldermen is to have the new building that fronts Wisconsin Avenue match the historic look of the neighboring buildings. The developers are willing to meet those demands.

Aldermen should approve the project if it is rejected by the Historic Preservation Commission.