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Huntley ready to launch downtown redevelopment

By Madhu Krishnamurthy

Huntley is poised to tear down a 19th century mill in downtown once the village board gives final approval Thursday for the site's redevelopment.

The former Sawyer-Kelley mill -- built in 1892 -- is part of a redevelopment plan that calls for razing the structure and erecting a one-story, 5,400-square-foot, multi-tenant commercial building in its place.

The existing 2½-story structure at 11801 Main St. sits in the heart of town just east of the municipal parking lot, which wraps around the property to the south. On the east side, a drive separates the lot from Parkside Pub.

The mill originally was owned by local businessmen W.G. Sawyer and John Kelley who helped develop Huntley.

A village committee recently greenlighted the nearly \$1 million redevelopment agreement with Billitteri Enterprises, LLC, for the property.

It's the first redevelopment project in Huntley's downtown tax increment financing district and kicks off the village's long-term downtown revitalization effort, said Victor Narusis, Huntley business recruitment coordinator.

"It's really the first major construction or redevelopment of any site in the downtown area," Narusis said. "It is an important kick off. We're just all very excited about it."

The \$940,000 redevelopment proposal includes a \$340,000 investment from the village -- that includes the \$115,000 the village spent to purchase the property.

"The village's contribution covers the acquisition of the building, demolition, everything that we need to do to deliver a site to the builder," Narusis said. "It also includes a fair amount of parking lot and landscaping work that we were going to do anyway as part of the downtown revitalization project."

The village board also is expected to approve roughly \$2 million worth of downtown improvements Thursday. Downtown revitalization will be completed during several years and funded as revenues become available.

Construction on the commercial building will begin as soon as the developer has secured leasing for 50 percent of the spaces, Narusis said.

"We want to ensure that a building is built and doesn't sit there vacant," Narusis said. "They have had a lot of interest. We're confident that (the developer's) going to be able to do that."

Though the commercial spaces will be built to modern specifications, the new building will have a retro look to resemble an early 20th century structure, Narusis said.

"We need to have some modern space available for tenants at market rates that work in this area," he said. "It is an important project from that perspective. Architecturally, it is very much in keeping with the look of the south side

of the square. In the early part of the 20th century, the buildings that were there were of much more character. We are really trying to recreate a look that was once there, and we are very fortunate to have found a developer that is interested in doing that."

The timeline for moving forward with demolition likely will be discussed at Thursday's village board meeting.

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