

## **Downtown Concord commercial building approved, casino proposal needs more time**

Written by Administrator

Thursday, 22 December 2022 14:47 -

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Construction of a five-story commercial building with a new restaurant, offices and an event space on Main Street is slated to begin in the coming months following the city's approval of the proposal Wednesday night.

Spearheaded by local Concord developer Stephen Duprey, the project will include the demolition of an 1854 Victorian home on the site, despite Duprey's efforts to relocate or donate the home.

With the approval came requests from Planning Board members for Duprey to work with city staff to explore the inclusion of more green space throughout the property like a rooftop garden, a living wall and additional landscaping, to which Duprey agreed.

The new building will be located between the Concord Food Co-op and the Bank of New Hampshire Stage and is designed to feature an eye-catching, colorful exterior. Duprey expects to have a Friendly Toast restaurant on the first floor and three floors of office space between an event space on the fifth floor that will be operated by the Grappone Conference Center, he said.

Duprey had initially planned a two-story building for the site but city officials asked him to "think bigger," he said.

The Friendly Toast, which will take up the entirety of the first floor, is a popular chain restaurant throughout New England that advertises an all-day brunch bar and signature Bloody Mary cocktails. The Concord location will mark the third in New Hampshire and 11th throughout the region.

The second, third and fourth floors will offer 15,000 square feet of office space with personalized and private lobbies and the fifth floor will act as an event space for birthday and retirement parties or business gatherings. Visitors are expected to have access to an outdoor seasonal rooftop deck with an old Airstream trailer converted into a bar.

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Behind the building, an outdoor patio space will feature a freight box kitchen modified for short-term rentals and pop-up eateries. In the winter, Duprey would like to use the space as a skating rink, he said.

Commemorating the history of the site, Duprey plans to honor its significance as a bakery that served Civil War troops by decorating it with historical memorabilia and artifacts from the Victorian home.

Despite Duprey's formal proposal to the Planning Board, he noted that he might make additional changes to the site and could be back before them in the coming months for future modifications.

### Casino proposal

Board members heard updated plans for the construction of another major development on the East Side of the city that would include a casino, hotel, and restaurant off Loudon Road on Break O'Day Drive.

The first phase of the project would include the construction of a 24,000-square-foot gaming room with 634 seats and an 8,500-square-foot restaurant and brew-pub that could hold up to 150 diners. The new building would be located near the intersection of Loudon and Sheep Davis roads. Future plans call for a hotel and event center that would increase the footprint to 43,000 square feet.

The project is being proposed by former state senator and Concord businessman Andy Sanborn who owns the Draft Sports Bar & Grill and the Concord Casino, a small-scale charitable gaming establishment in downtown Concord. He said the success of his current business gave him the idea for the new facility and said it would create a new gateway while giving back to charity, per state law which requires charitable gaming centers and casinos to donate 35% of gross revenue every 10 days.

Charities could include youth sports leagues, veteran services, domestic violence prevention programs, animal shelters, supporters of the homeless, and addiction services among others, he said. Additionally, the establishment will employ over 250 people and attract more tourism to the city, Sanborn said.

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However, Bruce Carri, who lives less than half a mile from the site, expressed concerns over increased traffic in the area and asked if a casino would be the best use for the undeveloped land.

“Given that this is a gateway from the east of the city, I’m not sure it’s the best use of the site to have a casino be the first thing people see when they come in from the Seacoast,” Carri said. “It’s not the best image for the Capital City that we should want to convey.”

Though Sanborn and engineer Nick Golon of TF Moran requested the discussion and vote be continued to the Jan. 18 meeting, they wanted to update the board on their progress to adhere to the Fire Marshall’s request of including emergency access and egress connections for emergency personnel and customer safety.

The complete application will be reviewed next month.

“We are still very excited about this project and we wanted to let you know we’ve been working diligently in the shadows to move this forward and we feel like we’re almost at the point to do so,” Golon said.

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