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## Visit Beloit project to transform historic property to see construction soon

By AUSTIN MONTGOMERY Staff Writer

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Visit Beloit Executive Director Celestino Ruffini explains aspects of the tourism organization's plan to redevelop the former Angel Museum property at 656 Prospect in Beloit. Construction is expected to take place over the next 120 days, with Visit Beloit staff set to occupy the space in new offices by the end of the year.

Austin Montgomery/Beloit Daily News



BELOIT—After two years of preparation and a change to construction plans due to COVID-19, Visit Beloit is expected to occupy the former Angel Museum property at 656 Pleasant St., by the end of the year, according to Visit Beloit Executive Director Celestino Ruffini.

Renovations to the historic future home of Visit Beloit are “imminent,” Ruffini said, as he is poised to sign a construction contract worth \$852,500 to jumpstart a 120-day work timeline. The construction includes offices for staff and site work needed to occupy the building that previously held the iconic Angel Museum in the former St. Paul’s Catholic Church.

“It’s the beginning of a new chapter and a new era for our organization,” Ruffini said. “This project shows that even during an unprecedented time through the pandemic, we continue to move forward on a project that will set us apart from other communities and contribute to the continued redevelopment of Beloit’s downtown riverfront.”

The Visit Beloit Board of Directors delayed aspects of the project but approved the construction of Visit Beloit offices and exterior work. An expansion to add a future event space capable of hosting various functions was pushed back to 2022, at the earliest, Ruffini said.

Visit Beloit, like many tourism groups across the country, relies heavily on hotel and motel tax revenue that has declined sharply since mid-March, but the organization was able to retain enough capital on-hand to keep the project moving, Ruffini said.



“I think the pandemic could have played a greater role in it, but we’ve brought ourselves to the point where we could move forward with it,” Ruffini said. “We were prepared enough that the pandemic forced us to be reflective on what we were entering into, but it wasn’t going to prevent us from moving forward.”

Ruffini said in the spring he was initially concerned about the future of the project, but stressed the property sale from the City of Beloit in January, coupled with an idea to redevelop the property since 2018, had built up strong prestige to continue towards construction.

“The board reaffirmed a number of times the importance of moving forward on the project after we were the successful bidder,” Ruffini said. “We’re fulfilling the promise that we made, and we will be able to grow as an organization.”

Since October of 2017, Visit Beloit staff have worked out of a temporary office space in the Eclipse Center following a change in construction plans for the Goodwin Hotel and Velvet Buffalo Modern Italian restaurant.

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