

Claremont Boards Gives OK to Renovation Plan

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Claremont — The city's Planning Board unanimously approved a site plan and conditional use permit on Monday night for a complete overhaul of the Goddard Block on Pleasant Street, where New Hampton, N.H.-based New England Family Housing is planning 36 apartments.

The approval comes with a condition that all required parking — a minimum of one space per unit — is secured before a certificate of occupancy is issued.

"I can live with that. It will give me ample time to find an overall solution to the parking," New England Family Housing CEO Kevin Lacasse told the board.

The property includes 19 spaces, which means another 17 will need to be identified, with some of those potentially being city-owned.

Previously, the Zoning Board of Adjustment approved a variance that reduced required parking, which had been 1.5 spaces per unit.

Adequate parking has been identified as a major deterrent to redeveloping the city's downtown buildings.

"We don't have a final solution, but it is something we are working on," City Planner Mike McCrory told the board about parking for the Goddard Block. "The goal is to find a solution that satisfies the needs of not only this property, but others as well. It is not easy. It will take a lot of city buy-in to make this work,"

Lacasse, whose company owns and manages other Claremont properties, including the Latchis building, also on Pleasant Street, has a purchase and sales agreement on the Goddard Block.

The building has been vacant since last year, when the city condemned it because of numerous code violations and forced the tenants to move.

Architect Jay Barrett, of White River Junction, told the board the “bones” of the three-story, early 20th-century building are in excellent shape, but the mechanical, plumbing and electrical systems need to be replaced and a sprinkler system needs to be installed.

“It will be a complete gut job,” Barrett said.

The reconfigured space will increase the number of apartments to 36 from 24, including six on the ground floor in the back of the building. The front will remain as commercial space.

Also in the back of the building will be a new entryway and landscaping.

In addition to six units, the ground floor will have storage, a community room and an office. At least nine of the apartments would be two-bedroom units.

With the board’s approval, Lacasse said he now will proceed with finalizing the design for the studio, one- and two-bedroom apartments and preparing bid specifications while continuing to work on securing funding for estimated expenses of between \$5 million and \$6 million.

A Community Development Block Grant is pending and Lacasse also is seeking low-income housing tax credits and historic tax credits.

The ideal timeline would be for the project to be bid early next spring, followed by a 10-month construction period, Lacasse said.

New England Family Housing will repair and restore the building’s facade and will work with a state historic preservationist to ensure adherence to historic tax credit requirements.

“To bring back downtown, we need people living there,” said Barrett, the architect. “We hope this is a good first step toward a broader revitalization.”