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Council to get input on Heibel-March

Feedback looks mostly positive.

By [Rudi Keller](#)

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A construction company's proposal to acquire and renovate the historic Heibel-March building has reached the Columbia City Council with neighborhood support and an endorsement from one of two city advisory boards that considered the plan.

Tomorrow night, council members will receive reports from the North Central Columbia Neighborhood Association and the Historic Preservation Commission urging them to allow Legacy Construction Group Inc. to take over the brick commercial building at Wilkes Boulevard and Range Line Street.

The next step would be for the council to propose a measure to sell the building — but not the land — to Legacy in exchange for investments in renovating the property, which was the focus of aborted revitalization attempts by two not-for-profit groups.

In a Wednesday letter to the council, neighborhood association President John Clark said his group's board unanimously endorsed the proposal. The construction group, owned by Keith Windham, submitted a request that it be allowed to acquire the building for a "minimal price" with a promise to invest at least \$75,000 in its renovation.

The Historic Preservation Commission endorsed the proposal at its Dec. 7 meeting. The building is adjacent to Field Park. The city's Parks and Recreation Commission considered the proposal but did not specifically endorse the Legacy plan.

The former grocery and drugstore just north of the Columbia College campus once served a working-class neighborhood fueled by factory jobs.

The neighborhood association doesn't favor opening the process to seek additional proposals, Clark wrote. The last time that happened, First Chance for Children was given control of the building but found that it would take \$350,000 to renovate it and abandoned the project.

Legacy believes it can do the project for much less, in part because it is a construction company that can call on in-house expertise. And it is ready to go on the project, Windham said Friday. "We wouldn't go through this if we didn't have the financing," he said.

The proposal seems to be the best chance to save the 90-year-old building, said Assistant City Manager Paula Hertwig-Hopkins. Past attempts to save the building have been done "with the best of intentions, but all have faced challenges," she noted.

Also at its meeting tomorrow, the council will consider a proposal to ban drinking in three downtown parks as a way to control the behavior of transients.

Paquin Park, 212 Waugh St.; Village Square Park, 114 N. Ninth St.; and Flat Branch Park, 101 S. Fourth St., are places where police have continually had problems with intoxicated people, a report says.

The city open container law applies to drinking on streets, sidewalks and in city parking garages. The proposal to ban drinking in the three parks is the result of complaints from downtown business owners and safety fears, Hertwig-Hopkins said.

The city would place signs about the prohibition so police can issue summonses and trespass warnings to violators, she said.

Parks Director Mike Hood said he doesn't favor banning alcohol from all parks but that in downtown parks it is a problem. "This simply gives police one more tool to deal with the issue," he said.

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