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Office Building Approved: Hartford Planning OKs Prospect Street Project

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White River Junction — The first phase of a proposed office complex on Prospect Street in White River Junction won the approval of the Planning Commission Monday night, a major regulatory hurdle for a four-story, 38,600-square-foot building that will house offices of the state Department of Motor Vehicles and Agency of Human Services.

The project received the approval of the Zoning Board of Adjustment last week.

With the approvals also came the determination of how to regulate traffic at the four-way intersection on the Vermont side of the Route 4 bridge between White River Junction and West Lebanon. The decision: a traffic light.

A higher volume of traffic is expected to be turning from Prospect Street, and the signal also will regulate the traffic leaving the new Listen at River Point complex.

The projections are for about 120 employees and 220 visitors per day to travel to Prospect Street once the first phase of the project is developed.



“We are pleased to finally receive approval,” said project developer Steve Morton, of Williston, Vt.-based DEW Properties.

Monday night marked the third time the Prospect Street development partners were before the commission, and last Wednesday

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was their third visit before the Zoning Board.

“We have beaten this horse pretty much to death,” Planning Commission member Peter Merrill said Monday night.

There is, however, still more to be done.

Because it involves changes to town roads, the Selectboard must approve the plans for the intersection. And the Zoning Board and Planning Commission approvals came with conditions that must be met before a building permit is issued.

Zoning Administrator Jo-Ann Ells said Monday the conditions are routine and are “things we need to iron out before we move forward.”

Morton concurred.

“We are not bothered by or concerned by the conditions,” he said. “We will meet them all.”

The Zoning Board’s conditions range from the applicant submitting written documentation addressing ongoing maintenance of fallen leaves and acorns from the proposed trees along Prospect Street, to submitting verification confirming the Department of Public Works has approved the design for new water and sewer lines and hydrants.

The first phase of the Prospect Street project is estimated to cost \$8 million and includes construction of the office building, roadway improvements, a river walk and site work for the nearly six-acre parcel. The first phase encompasses about two-thirds of the land that DEW Properties plans to redevelop. Although future projects haven’t been officially proposed, illustrative plans show three other commercial buildings, and Morton said Monday he would “like to see the site fully built out in five years or less.”

State Agency of Transportation officials, town officials and Prospect Street developers convened in Montpelier last month to discuss the intersection improvements. Morton said Monday that VTrans agreed with the outcome of a traffic study that found a traffic light at the intersection with Route 4, just west of the bridge, would be sufficient, at least initially.

A roundabout, however, still could be in the intersection’s future. Morton said the traffic signal will be sufficient to support the

traffic expected to be generated by the first phase of the project and one additional office or retail building. Beyond that, though, a roundabout would be necessary. Because of the width of the bridge and the underpass along Route 4, proper turn lanes can’t be built, according to the traffic study.

When looking at the applications for the first phase of the project, Zoning Board and Planning Commission members were tasked with basing their votes solely off the application as presented — potential future development could not be considered.

Morton said the developers are negotiating with town officials over who will pay what percentage of the intersection improvements.

The first phase of the project is on schedule to break ground in the spring, with completion expected the following year, a timeline that is similar to the nearby Route 4 bridge reconstruction project planned by the New Hampshire Department of Transportation.

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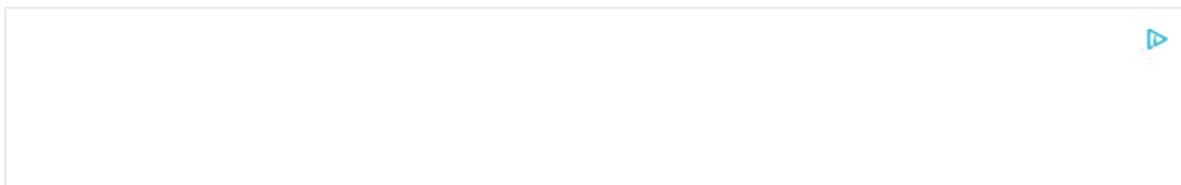
The agenda for tonight's Selectboard meeting has already been set, but Town Manager Hunter Rieseberg said on Monday that it's possible the project could be slated for the Oct. 29 Selectboard meeting.

Jordan Cuddemi can be reached at jcuddemi@vnews.com or 603-727-3248

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