



THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Talks begin to remodel Bellingham waterfront building

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Port of Bellingham Commissioners unanimously agreed with a committee recommendation to begin negotiations with a group that wants to remodel the waterfront Boardmill building into a hotel and convention center while adding housing and a food hub.

Port staff now begin negotia-

tions with BoardMill Group LLC, a Whatcom-based team that includes Raymond Faber, Faber Construction; Sean Hegstad, Haven Design Workshop; Michael Watters, developer; and Elie Samuel, developer.

Under this proposal, the Boardmill building near Waypoint Park will be converted into three levels, with the upper two having 74 hotel rooms and the first level being an event area. The food hub could have a va-

riety of options, including restaurants with a greenhouse roof, cafes and brewpubs to create gathering areas. The separate residential buildings on the property could either be condominiums or apartments, with the goal of creating different price points.

The proposal got the highest score out of the four finalists. It was selected by a committee that includes port and city staff as well as representatives from

the Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism and the Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce. The other three proposals included ideas such as putting in an aquatic center and moving the YMCA there, putting in a hotel/soccer stadium and going with a hotel/convention center.

The negotiation period is for 90 days, which can be extended, said Mike Hogan, a spokesman for the port. If the negotia-

tions are unsuccessful, the port would then reach out to the other three finalists.

“We hope to complete a property transaction by the end of the year, but the most important thing will be to make sure it is the best possible project for our community before bringing a Purchase and Sale Agreement to the Port Commission for consideration,” Hogan said in an email.

During the discussion before and after voting, port commissioners appeared to have two concerns: Acknowledging that the YMCA/aquatic center was very popular with the public and what type of hotel/convention center would be needed for the

SEE WATERFRONT, 4A



FABER CONSTRUCTION/PORT OF BELLINGHAM Courtesy to The Bellingham Herald

Option A: BoardMill Block 2022 proposal to the Port of Bellingham for development of the Boardmill building near Waypoint Park, on the waterfront in Bellingham, Wash.

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community.

Based on the email he received the past couple of weeks, Port Commissioner Michael Shepard said there is definitely a desire for a major building that could be used for the public year-round. Commissioner Bobby Briscoe added that while the YMCA didn't seem to be the best fit for the Boardmill building to him, port staff should reach out to the YMCA to see if another spot in the Waterfront District could work.

The commissioners also expressed a desire for a larger hotel and conven-

tion center than originally proposed. Shepard noted that while this area has a variety of meeting areas that can handle local events and weddings, a larger facility is needed to attract conventions from across the U.S.

Elliott Smith, director of real estate for the port, noted during the meeting that port staff and the group will start to work on the specific details of the project, such as square footage and dimensions for the convention center.

In talking about why they agreed with the committee about this selec-

tion, commissioners seemed to be in agreement that BoardMill Group LLC's plan ticked off the most boxes in a variety of areas, including funding, how quickly the project could be done and creating architecture that fit the former working waterfront area.

Commissioner Ken Bell summed it up by saying that he found this proposal to be better for the port and its vision, which was to recoup the cost of cleanup in the district and put the property back on the Whatcom County tax rolls.

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