

City Council approves center, businesses on Patterson; Business 40 path also closer to reality

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

A new community center and businesses will be coming to Patterson Avenue after the Winston-Salem City Council approved a rezoning request at its Monday, April 4 meeting.

The former 7-Up bottling company building at 1800 N. Patterson Ave. was rezoned to allow its current owner, Mercy Rahma, Inc., to renovate it for a variety of uses. Azzat Amer, president of Mercy-Rahma, said he already had tenants lined up for the convenience store, garage, warehouse, barbershop and salon that will be housed in the 18,000 square foot building. There will also be a community center, which Amer said is his way of giving back to the community.

Lamaya Williams, and her husband Ira, are consulting with Amer on the community center. She said though it's still early in the planning stages, ideally it'll be a place for kids to come after school with amenities like a library and computer lab. She said she spent much of her childhood at a community center and hopes to be able to give the same experience to youth today.

"It was really a way for kids to be in one place, in a safe space, do homework or whatever and have fun with the neighborhood kids without any fear of outside influence or doing anything bad and that's the vision I have for this," said Lamaya Williams, who has many years of non-profit experience, including her current position as director of operations at the local Big Brothers, Big Sisters.

The building will be renovated with



Amer



Williams

\$475,000 in Revitalizing Urban Commercial Areas (RUCAs) grants from the city, which Amer matched with his own funds for the \$950,000 renovation. Amer said he expects to begin construction next week and have it completed within four months.

Approval for rezoning was delayed because local residents weren't aware of what was going in the building. After meeting with the North Winston Neighborhood Association, the terms of the loan were altered to include no sale of alcohol on the property for 10 years and that there will be no nightclub or Sweepstakes parlor there.

The City Council also approved an attempt to secure a \$5 million federal grant, which the city will match, for a \$10 million multi-use bike and pedestrian path that will run along Business 40, acting as a connector around the downtown area. If the City secures the money, the path would be built during the Business 40 renovations. City Council Member Richard Clark was the only dissenting vote. After the meeting, he said he didn't feel like the path was an efficient use of funds, since the

same money could build four miles of sidewalk.

The city council approved unanimously that adult establishments can only be open from 7 a.m.-2:30 a.m. in an attempt to curb late night crime. Winston-Salem Chamber President Gayle Anderson said she heard no opposition to it from businesses and Downtown Winston-Salem Partnership President Jason Thiel said his organization supported it.

"I know this is a citywide issue, but we've had a microcosm of issues that have been well reported in the press, I'll leave it at that, after 2 a.m. in the downtown area, so we strongly support this," said Thiel.

There's been several late night criminal incidents that have grabbed headlines at a downtown strip club, Lollipops, which the city is currently trying to close with a nuisance abatement suit. City Council Member James Taylor said the ordinance is not aimed at any one business, but is

aimed at issues around the city.

Previously there was no restriction on the hours of such businesses. ABC permits restrict businesses from serving alcohol outside of the hours of 7 a.m.-2 a.m. and gives until 2:30 a.m. for patrons to consume alcohol and for it be cleared from the serving area.

The City Council also approved modifications to its 2007 incentive agreement with Wake Forest University Health Sciences to construct three new facilities in the Innovation Quarter. The agreement for the nearly \$5 million in assistance stated that the money would be paid back if there wasn't 100,000 square feet of office, lab and light industrial space built in ten years, which the project hasn't done. The new agreement gives the project an extra ten years and now requires 150,000 square feet to be constructed with requirements for affordable/workforce housing.

Raises, 401K contribution in city budget 2016-17 preview

Budget would raise city's minimum wage to \$10.40 but could also raise taxes

BY TODD LUCK
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A potential raise of up to 4 percent for non-public safety employees and a new 401k contribution could be in the upcoming City budget.



Rowe

A preview of the 2016-17 budget was presented to a special meeting of the City Council on Monday, April 4. The city is significantly behind market pay in many of its positions and, other than sworn police officers, doesn't have 401k contributions, a common benefit offered by other municipalities. This has been having a negative effect on the City's ability to recruit and retain employees. The potential raises and a new 2 percent contribution to a 401k are an attempt to start remedying that situation, though it may also result in a tax increase.

However, the proposed raises would still leave many positions greatly below the pay in other markets.

"That is actually the problem, that we have some categories that are just way below market," said City Council Member Dan Besse.

Besse suggested raising pay for such positions in addition to across-the-board pay raises. He asked staff to see how much it would cost to bring such positions up to market pay.

Denise "D.D." Adams acknowledged that it may take many years to "close the gap." She said the City might need to look to new benefits to attract employees.

"Maybe not even in our lifetime here, we may not see this remedied, but it is our responsibility to at least come up with a prevention and corrective action so it never gets like this again," she said.

A balanced projected base budget of \$192 million dollars was presented by Assistant City Manager Ben Rowe. It includes nearly \$2.4 million to cover the

action the City Council took in February to raise minimum public safety worker pay by 7.5 percent with a 2 percent annual supplement in an attempt to help with retention in the fire and police departments. It also covers the hiring of several new positions like five technicians for the consolidated City-County Forensic Services and operating expenses of new facilities like district police offices.

The budget also includes an increase in the subsidy to the M.C. Benton Convention Center, since part of it will be closed and unable to generate revenue during renovations. There was also money for renovations and repairs at parks and recreation centers, including amenities improvements at Bolton Park, ceiling repair at Sims Recreation Center, and creek bank maintenance at Happy Hill Park.

The base budget includes a merit raise of approximately 2 percent, including benefits, for city employees, which costs \$2.2 million. Despite increased revenues from sources like property taxes and savings from things like retirements, attrition and lower fuel prices, that was the only raise for those employees in the base budget.

In the proposed budget enhancements that is additional spending for which funds will have to be found, there is an additional 2 percent market adjustment for non-public safety workers, which costs nearly \$1.2 million, and the 2 percent contribution for 401k, effective January 2017, which will cost \$558,000.

Budget enhancements also would raise the minimum wage of city employees from \$10.10 to \$10.40, which costs \$39,000 and provides for several new fire and police positions. The budget enhancements come to nearly \$3.5 million, which would be approximately the equivalent of a 1.7 cent property tax increase.

City Manager Lee Garrity said that he may ask for a "modest" increase in taxes, but won't know until May when the staff has more refined budget projections.

A proposed budget is scheduled to be brought before the council on May 26. After several weeks of committee meetings, the budget will go before the council for approval on June 20 and go into effect July 1.



Adams



Besse

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