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NEWS

Village awarded grant for downtown renewal

BY BILL LIVICK, OREGON OBSERVER EDITOR

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Oregon developer Paul Lynch is back in the news, this time with word that an \$11,000 grant for downtown revitalization has been awarded to the village to help launch one of Lynch's projects.

Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk's office announced Friday that the county selected the village of Oregon for a Better Urban Infill Development (BUILD) Grant for a downtown revitalization project.

Lynch, president of PLH Development & Associates LLC, said he pitched his idea to the BUILD Committee in early May, hoping the village would win the grant. Lynch's company is in the initial stages of planning to redevelop five parcels on about 1.5 acres on Jefferson Street, behind BrouxNellie's Diner.

Lynch said the grant creates a partnership between his company and the village. "(Village administrator) Mike Gracz and his staff are going to have to be involved," Lynch said.

He and village officials have hired Vierbicher Associates Engineering to study and recommend the best options for downtown properties that Lynch's company has acquired, which include three residential homes and the building that houses RX Automotive. Oregon Public Works director Mark Below owns a fourth home in a cluster of residential properties between the railroad tracks and BrouxNellie's Diner, and Lynch said Below has agreed to sell it to PLH Development.

The village will use its grant money to pay half of Vierbicher Associates' bill; Lynch will pay the other \$11,000.

"We want to work with the village, and this grant allows the village to participate in this with us," Lynch said Monday. "This basically is a continuation of the grant the village received a while back to do the downtown master plan. We want to make sure this project adheres to the master plan, and this grant allows us to do that."

The master plan calls for a mix of residential and commercial development downtown. Lynch said part of Vierbicher's study will be to determine what sort of businesses and residential housing would work best in the area. The company will also arrange meetings between the village, PLH & Associates and downtown property and business owners "to find out what they'd like to see in the new development," Lynch said. "Everybody's going to have an opinion, and I'm not going to be able to please them all, but we want to take the opportunity to find out what they think should be part of the new development."

Lynch said the study will produce a site plan, taking into consideration such concerns as parking, traffic flow and building appearances. "We want to keep it historic with the rest of the downtown," he said, "but also give a bit of a modern flair to it. This \$22,000 is not only to work with local businesses and property owners, but also to design this thing. That's exactly what this BUILD money is meant for."

Lynch said some types of new business – such as another restaurant – are obviously not needed downtown, but something like a new department store "would be awesome."

He said Vierbicher's study would likely take several months to complete and that by October or November, "we ought to be able to say here's what they think the development should look like, and give it to the architect to design it." Lynch said by year's end, his company could have a plan ready to present to the Oregon Planning Commission and Village Board.

In the meantime, he will work with residential and commercial tenants in the redevelopment area to build or find suitable housing. "We're working with the commercial tenants to find them a new location that will actually enhance their business," Lynch said.

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