

Board OKs \$265K to create linear park at rock facade

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Color proposals of work to be done on the rock facade on West Main Street in downtown Elkin show, top left, the enclosed storage for the lowest level; bottom left, a new linear park which will include bathrooms and opportunities for benches, planters, play area and more; bottom right, large colorful canvas shades and a terrace at the second level windows. The image at the top right is the side view of the plans for the area, which will include stabilizing the granite facade.

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Ricky White of Garanco Inc. introduces proposed plans for the granite facade on West Main Street in downtown Elkin at Monday's Elkin Board of Commissioners meeting.

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Downtown Elkin will be getting a new linear park at the site of the granite rock facade on West Main Street. The \$265,000 project will include stabilizing the historic facade and creating a structure which can be easily enclosed for future marketability opportunities.

The decision by the Elkin Board of Commissioners to approve the project and funding to be pulled from the town's fund balance was not a unanimous one. Commissioner Terry Kennedy was absent from the meeting, and Commissioner Bob Norton, saying he couldn't see spending that much taxpayer money on the project, voted no.

During a project update meeting at the beginning of October, Ricky White with Garanco Inc. provided a bid and proposal on stabilization of the facade wall and explained to commissioners that the bracing proposed could be worked further into a build out. This caught the curiosity of the commissioners who asked White to come back to the board at Monday's meeting with the proposed full project.

White brought with him Bobby Patterson of Architectural Design Associates who was working with Garanco on the project and the two presented a proposal which will turn the open space behind the facade into an enclosed basement storage area; a street-level linear park to include bathrooms and other opportunities such as benches, planters and even a play area for kids; and a second level even with the upstairs windows of the facade to just be a terrace over the first portion of the park. The rest of the park would be shaded by large colorful canvas triangles hung from cables.

Patterson explained that the proposed park and work could easily be transitioned into a building to be used as offices, retail or even housing if the option to sell the space ever came available.

White said the original bracing proposal in October wasn't temporary. "It was for something that could be added on for future," he said of how the concept for the park and restrooms evolved.

Patterson said when he visited the facade, "I walked through that space and was immediately struck by the exterior walls.

"We wanted to do it in a way that stabilizes the space and launches it to a marketable space later, something that improves its value," he said.

The \$256,000 cost for the project will include the first phase of bracing the facade, and the second phase to repair to the existing concrete pad and the wall at the base along the street, adding the street-level concrete floor for the linear park area and the restrooms, as well as building the terrace which could be added to for a full second floor later if desired and the canopy cover. Stairs will allow access from the back of the building to the linear park level, and another set of stairs will lead to the terrace.

Columns will support the levels and allow for art work or banners to be hung within the linear park without having to attach them to the walls of the surrounding structures, White explained.

“Everything is movable. The path is just color on concrete, everything except the restrooms are movable,” said Patterson of the design. “We are trying to treat this in two very important ways — don’t do anything you can’t walk away from but be able to market the space for later.”

He said the space has the potential for multiple naming opportunities with things such as benches, planters, even the play area could be named for a donor. “This space is absolutely wonderful,” said Patterson.

The look of the granite facade from the front will not change, he noted.

After already approving removing \$371,000 in funding to come out of the fund balance for work on the future trails heritage center, Commissioner Norton said he just couldn’t see spending another \$265,000 of taxpayers on real estate.

“The building next to this is in questionable status. What happens if the owner doesn’t keep it up? Are we going to rescue it too?” Norton said. “We have streets and infrastructure” which need attention. “Is this the best way to spend our money?”

Commissioner Dr. Skip Whitman said he also was concerned about spending tax money, but he said, “It is how you spin it. You can say you spent \$600,000 on real estate, or tell them you should see what we’re doing downtown so they’ll buy into it and buy a planter.”

Town Manager John Holcomb added with the audit approaching, he thinks “the fund balance will be increasing a little more than I thought we would.”

“I moved here about three and a half years ago, and something like this would’ve made me want to move it even more,” said Jennifer White, who is part of the Main Street Advisory Board who took this project on to save the facade. The Main Street group also has pledged \$10,000 in funding, part coming from the downtown district tax which the group gets and part from a fundraiser held benefiting the facade project.

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