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Inn construction to begin soon

by KATIE DUNN • Staff Writer

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WISE — If all goes well, construction and renovations at the Inn at Wise should begin in July.

The Wise County Industrial Development Authority received an update last Tuesday from Thompson & Litton of Wise, the firm providing architectural and engineering services for the project.

T&L Project Manager Dick Houchins said the design phase for the estimated \$11.6 million project is approximately 80 percent complete. He said he hopes to advertise for construction bids by May 20 and award a contract by June 20. Construction will ideally begin within 30 days of this date and likely take the better part of a year to complete.

“The hope is that by the time school starts in calendar year 2013, the inn will be occupiable,” said Houchins. “That assumes a whole lot of things go well.”

T&L Architect Mark Swecker said design plans approved by the authority in November have not changed much, with only minor tweaks made.

Houchins added that floor plans and elevations are almost complete, with final details being added prior to bidding the project.

NEW ADDITION

Several of the authority’s comments and questions regarded the inn’s new addition, a 23,427-square-foot structure that will include 49 guest rooms, a restaurant, diner and conference center. The conference center will seat between 180 and 190 people if seated at tables and chairs and 220 people if seated in just chairs.

Houchins said while the new addition will share a similar design with the historic inn, it will not be identical.

He said the Virginia Department of Historic Resources suggested the new addition be compatible with the existing inn, but not identical to it.

“The existing inn should be remarkable in itself, and the new addition shouldn’t try to completely duplicate the character of that historic structure,” he said.

This way, anyone looking at the inn will be able to tell the old from the new, he continued.

Member Kim Mullins asked whether the existing inn would remain white, noting that a long time ago it had been unpainted.

Houchins said following extensive research and recommendations from DHR, the building will likely remain painted. He said DHR has cautioned that stripping the building of paint could damage the structure.

Houchins also noted that authority members can opt to paint the inn's new addition, but he cautioned that repainting is costly and DHR has discouraged painting the new wing the same color as the historic inn. If the authority chooses to paint the wing, DHR suggested it be done in a different shade of white or different color altogether, explained Houchins.

The construction contract will likely be awarded without including painting as part of the project, he continued. That way, the authority can decide later if it wants to include that aspect.

PARKING SPACE

Also related to the inn, County Attorney Karen Mullins asked authority members whether they want to close off the area behind the historic inn where old motel units were recently demolished. She said the county's maintenance department worried people might take back over the parking in that area. Carl Snodgrass, IDA director, said he had no problem with people parking there until construction begins. He said if Houchins' projections are correct, construction will begin within a few months and the area will then be closed off. Authority members concurred.

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