

Missing deadline

Todd Building developers won't hit July 1 target, will be required to pay back \$150,000 to city, DIDC

Mary Freda, Reporter

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DUNKIRK — The Todd Project won't make its slated July 1 deadline.

Project developers Ray Willey and Bill Brown told Dunkirk Industrial Development Corporation (DIDC) during its meeting Monday that the Todd Opera House project is behind schedule.

Originally, two restaurants — Firehouse BBQ and a Mexican restaurant — were slated to be complete and in operation in Todd Opera House by July 1, per the city's contract with Todd Building Group, LLC.

Now, Willey said that won't be the case.

"We've been working on the project for quite some time. As you know, it hasn't gone as robust and quickly as we had originally planned for," Willey said. "The development agreement outlined a two-year period that we would get the building renovated, the restaurants open. Of course, we're coming up on that two-year period and that's not exactly close in sight."

Willey said a couple of reasons for the delay include other projects he, along with co-developer Brown, are involved with in Indiana and elsewhere.

Willey told The Commercial Review they are working on six ventures in New Castle alone.

"In retrospect, I probably made a mistake in negotiating ... I probably should have asked for three years or so," Willey said. "It's a little bit of an ambitious timeline to start with."

Council member Jack Robbins, who previously voted against the project, asked Willey a series of questions, including: "So, Ray what'll be your timeline then? What's your timeline now?"

"I knew you were going to ask me Jack. I'm going to defer just a week and get back to you because it's driven by a financing," Willey responded. "I think we have that figured (out), the direction we're going. But can I get another week's time from you? And I'll come back with what we consider to be a reasonable, revised timeline."

If the restaurants aren't renovated and in operation by July 1, city attorney Wes Schemenaur said Todd Building Group will have to pay back the \$150,000 it was given by DIDC (\$75,000) and Dunkirk City Council (\$75,000).

Council started discussing the project in March 2017. Concerns raised by the project included protecting the city's and taxpayer money and lack of financial backing. Ultimately, the project passed 3-2, with council members Jesse Bivens and Robbins dissenting.

Willey told DIDC that Todd Building Group has spent \$300,000 on the renovations thus far — \$90,000 of which have come from the city and DIDC. The other \$210,000 has come from a \$50,000 loan from Bank of Geneva and private funding.

Willey said there's still "another few hundred thousand" left to go, and Todd Building Group has yet to secure permanent financing. However, the city is only responsible for doling out another \$60,000 to



Ray Willey, co-developer of the Todd Project, stands in the Todd Opera House Monday. Willey and fellow developer Bill Brown told Dunkirk Industrial Development Corporation on Monday that they will not meet their July 1 deadline for having two restaurants open. As a result, they will be required to pay back \$150,000 in funding provided by the city and DIDC. (The Commercial Review/Mary Freda)



help fund the renovations.

The building still needs plumbing, a heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system, electric, additional flooring, a fire sprinkler system and equipment.

In November 2017, Willey told The Commercial Review he anticipated Firehouse BBQ opening in spring 2018, with the Mexican restaurant open closer to its slated July 1 completion date. No restaurant has been contracted for the second space.

However, Willey said Todd Building Group anticipates beginning renovations for the Mexican restaurant after Firehouse BBQ opens.

"Bill and I are committed to seeing the project through," Willey said. "We're not going to abandon the project or walk away from it."

Willey added that he should be back in Dunkirk some time during the last two weeks of April.

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