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Developer outlines concept for hotel, residences in downtown Basalt

A developer looking at prime ground in Basalt outlined a conceptual plan Thursday that features a boutique hotel with about 60 rooms.

James DeFrancia, president of Lowe Enterprises, said no specific plan has been prepared yet for 2.6 acres of the former Pan and Fork Mobile Home Park near downtown Basalt, so the proposal could change. In addition to the small hotel, Lowe Enterprises is considering 12 hotel residences that would be two- or three-bedroom condominiums that would be targeted to second-home owners. The residences would be affiliated with the hotel and likely placed in the rental pool when the owners aren't there, he said.

A third component of the plan is 46 to 54 housing units designed for permanent residents. They would be a combination of one, two and three bedrooms, DeFrancia said.

As envisioned now, the project would be 150,000 square feet separated into an undetermined number of buildings. The south side of the property — closest to the intersection of Two Rivers Road and Midland Avenue — would be left open to provide access to a park the town of Basalt is developing along the Roaring Fork River. In addition, the buildings in the development would have walkways to the park, DeFrancia said.

He and Skip Behrhorst, a partner in Lowe Enterprises, outlined the plan for the Downtown Area Advisory Committee — a group of residents appointed by the Town Council to make recommendations on how to revitalize Basalt's core.

“This place leaps out at you immediately as the best place for a hotel. Water is always an attraction — anywhere.”

James DeFrancia, Lowe Enterprises

Behrhorst said underground parking would be part of the plan.

Lowe Enterprises is a national development firm that focuses on resort development and lodging. The firm has a long history in Aspen and Snowmass Village, dating back to its development of the Gant Condominiums and conference center more than 40 years ago.

Lowe Enterprises has a contract with Roaring Fork Community Development Corp., a nonprofit organization that owns the portion of the former trailer park closest to Two Rivers Road. The site is just west of downtown Basalt.

DeFrancia said Lowe isn't looking at retail or commercial space on the property.

"We think what downtown needs is people," DeFrancia said. The hotel and residential development will draw people for the existing shops and restaurants, he said. One restaurant is being considered as part of the hotel with an orientation toward the park.

"This place leaps out at you immediately as the best place for a hotel," DeFrancia said. "Water is always an attraction anywhere."

Behrhorst said Lowe Enterprises is proud of the projects it has developed in Aspen and elsewhere. The men said the hotel would not be branded or affiliated with a major chain. It would feature distinct architecture, character and services.

DeFrancia said he envisions a three- or three-and-a-half star hotel that doesn't offer room service. The proximity to Rocky Mountain Institute's Innovation Center and office building next door helps make the hotel viable, according to DeFrancia. The Rocky Mountain Institute plans to bring in clients year-round that it is working with on energy-efficiency issues.

Members of the downtown committee asked numerous questions but otherwise had little reaction to the plan. DeFrancia said Lowe Enterprises would refine the concept over the next two weeks "so that we can get a plan on the table."

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