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Alliant Energy Center campus plan unveiled, with committee's OK

By Jennifer Fetterly jfetterly@hngnews.com Dec 31, 2018



Sharon Corrigan



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Rivaling the Titledown District near Green Bay's Lambeau Field, the Dane County plan could cost \$90 million in public funding, with private investment kicking in more than \$205 million.

Consultants told Dane County Board supervisors last week that the "destination district" has the potential to create 1,400 new jobs and bring in around \$3 million annually in property, sales and hotel tax revenue.

Without a flush of new money, consultants said the county-owned facility, including the aging Veterans Memorial Coliseum, can't compete with regional facilities and will start to lose money in the future.

"If we do nothing with this campus we will be going backward in terms of our competitiveness level, the aging of the facility, and our ability to retain existing client groups that are outgrowing the facilities," said Rob Hunden, a consultant from Hunden Strategic Partners.

"In the meantime, your neighbors in Green Bay, Milwaukee, Illinois, Minnesota and all around the region are investing in new and improved facilities," Hunden said.

Right now, consultants say, the campus is underutilized. Consultants from Perkins + Will outlined the Alliant Energy Center Campus Master Plan to Dane County supervisors on Dec. 20.

Phase 1 priority projects could expand the exhibition hall, adding meeting space and ballroom space, parking. The plan also calls for a 300-room hotel and landscape and road improvements on the campus.

Another phase 1 alternative that would double the public funding price tag, would tear down the arena building and relocate it to the west end of campus. A new Gateway Plaza would replace the arena in the center of campus, surrounded by private development of another hotel and mixed residential/office/retail space.

Consultants say that the Alliant Energy Center redevelopment project could create a “destination district” over the next 15 years that could link with Lake Monona and Wingra Creek waterfronts, City of Madison parks, and downtown Madison.

While the \$24 million New Holland Exhibition Pavilions were added to the Alliant Energy Center (AEC) campus in 2014, and the 1995 exhibition hall is in good condition; the arena built in 1955, and the Coliseum built in 1967, are in fair/poor condition, according to a study.

The facility hosts World Dairy Expo, Midwest Horse Fair, the Dane County Fair, trade shows, concert events, and athletic competitions, including the CrossFit games this summer.

Right now the campus is running at a profit but consultants say that would change over the next few years, without upgrades.

The consultants did offer short-term improvements that focus on updating locker/dressing rooms, expanding the loading dock, projects that consultants estimated would cost around \$3 million.

The Alliant Energy Center Comprehensive Master Plan Oversight Committee recommended the master plan to the county board with input from business and government leaders, neighborhood groups and also organizations that book events at the Alliant Energy Center campus. Public feedback was gathered from public meetings, surveys at the Brat Fest and on POLCO, an online survey tool.

Consultants recommended that with the master planning process complete, the focus should be on design and funding.

Dane County Board Chair Sharon Corrigan said financing, implementation, and who will govern the campus needs to be decided. The Dane County Board and Dane County Executive Joe Parisi would need to consider funding in the county’s capital budget.

Corrigan said funding could come from multiple sources, like the New Holland pavilions project that used county funds, revenue from the facility, state funds, and private investment.

“Those investment decisions are not part of the report, that is something that needs to be worked on in the coming year,” Corrigan said.