

City considering expansion of hotel and conference center project

By [Jana Wiersema](#) - June 28, 2022

COLUMBUS, Ind. — Consultants are recommending that the city of Columbus should move forward with plans to create a downtown hotel and conference center — and even expand the scope of the project.

Hunden Strategic Partners presented an executive summary of their findings to the Columbus Redevelopment Commission on Monday. According to Redevelopment Director Heather Pope, the information has also been shared with Sprague Hotel Developers, the city's partner on the development.

"Our next steps will be to go back to the Spragues," said Pope. "...We have shared this PowerPoint with the Spragues, so they are aware of all of this and have had some conversations with them. And they're in the process of updating their numbers from their initial proposal, which was pre-pandemic."

The city's current plans call for a new hotel conference center to be constructed on downtown property that the city is receiving as part of a land swap with the county. However, the project was put on hold by Sprague in 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19 on the hospitality industry. In March of 2022, the commission engaged Hunden Strategic Partners to complete a \$21,600 update to their previous market and feasibility study for a downtown hotel and conference center.



Pictured: The exterior of The Commons with the Bartholomew County Courthouse pictured in the background Jan. 24, 2017, in downtown Columbus. Mike Wolanin | The Republic

The firm was hired for the original study in June of 2018 following the demolition of the Clarion Hotel and Conference Center. At the time, Hunden Strategic Partners recommended that Columbus could support a 140-room hotel with amenities such as 4,000- to 5,000-square- feet of conference room space, a 9,000-square-foot ballroom and a total of 380 parking spaces.

The firm is now recommending 150 or even 160 rooms and a 10,000 square-foot ballroom, said Rob Hunden. It's also recommended that the project include 400 spaces in its parking garage — 150 for the hotel, 150 for the conference center and 100 to replace existing surface parking that would be eliminated during construction.

For more on this story, see Wednesday's Republic.