

## **No New Bids On Complex**

City Resumes Review Of Proposed Hotel, Conference Center

**By PRESTON KNIGHT**

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**HARRISONBURG** — No one took the city up on its offer for competing bids for a hotel and conference center complex downtown, according to Harrisonburg Economic Development Director Brian Shull.

Tuesday was the deadline for developers to match dpM Partners' \$39.9 million proposal, which asks for \$9.5 million in public funding. Although five "serious" representatives contacted the city, none came through with a proposal.

Shull presented City Council in September with an unsolicited proposal from dpM, of Gaithersburg, Md., for the hotel and conference center. Since the firm approached the city unsolicited through the Public-Private Education Facilities and Infrastructure Act, competing bids had to be sought.

The act encourages the public and private sectors to work together on economically viable projects, such as civic centers and schools, that would benefit investors and taxpayers.

Shull said the city will now review its options, including whether to seek a third-party feasibility study that would provide more information to council before it takes a potential final vote on the proposal.

"It is a very ambitious project to fit all of it in a 60day timeline," he said of not receiving additional proposals.

The act sets a 45-day minimum time frame for competing offers. The city extended it to 60 days.

According to dpM's plan, construction of the 18,180square-foot conference center would require \$ 9.57 million in bonds issued by Harrisonburg, while the rest of the \$39.9 million project, including all hotel costs, would be privately financed.

The conference center, as proposed, could accommodate meetings for as many as 500 people. A restaurant would be included in the hotel, which would have 205 rooms.

In addition to 60 permanent jobs that developers say the complex would create, the construction phase of the project would add 100 temporary positions, according to the proposal.

DpM has not identified a specific location, but it seeks an area "within walking distance of Main Street," the proposal says.

Building a hotel and conference center has been a goal of Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance since the revitalization group formed nine years ago.

Local firms Mather Architects and Blackwell Engineering are part of dpM's project team.

City Manager Kurt Hodgen said that the staff would report back to council no later than early December on how to proceed.

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