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Moline shows plans for 'e3' building near WIU

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By Amy Rausch, arausch@qconline.com

MOLINE - Plans for the first building in University Square are under way and those involved in the project hope the high-tech, mixed-use, riverfront building will help build excitement in the city's next target area for development.

The building, being called e3 for its focus on education, entrepreneurship and the environment, will be located just west of the proposed Western Illinois University riverfront campus. University Square is the 15-acre property owned by Moline.



Photo:
 Concept for e3 building on/near WIU riverfront campus

No timetable is set for the building's construction.

The conceptual designs, survey work and other preliminary work was paid for with a \$250,000 grant Black Hawk College received from the department of Housing and Urban Development. The money was an earmark from former Rep. Lane Evans in 1999 and was to be used for the planning and design of a business center for Black Hawk College, said Jim Bowman, executive director of Renew Moline.

Black Hawk College had already made two unsuccessful attempts at building a business center and was about to have to return the money to HUD, Mr. Bowman said.

Plans for the e3 building includes space for the business center along with other economic and business development agencies, including the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Development, the Northwest Regional Entrepreneurial Center, Renew Moline and the Midwest Regional Entrepreneurial Center.

The first floor of the \$18 million to \$20 million building would include retail, possibly a bookstore, Internet cafe and restaurant. The second and third floors would be flexible office space and the fourth and fifth floors residential.

The market study on the project assumes Western Illinois University will build its riverfront campus and put \$75 million of investment into the area, along with relocating the petroleum business and metal scrap yard.

Eppstein Uhen Architects, based in Milwaukee, Wis., did the preliminary designs. The plans

call for 30,000 square feet of office space, 40-80 residential units and 15,000 to 20,000 square feet of retail space. The architects are keeping the plans flexible to best meet the needs of the project as it evolves, said John Fox, of Eppstein Uhen.

The building will be positioned to take advantage of the views down river. Mr. Fox also said the building will be designed to be "four-sided" rather than having a traditional front and back. It will have pedestrian access to Western Illinois University on the east side, as well as a strong relationship to the river, parks and bike path on the north side.

An outdoor terrace will overlook the river and provide an outdoor dining space and meeting area.

"We're trying for a high-tech look," Mr. Fox said. "We're trying to make this look like on cohesive high-tech building, so (residents) are living in this high-tech building."

The plans also include a green roof and energy efficiency.

Gorman and Company, a developer based in Wisconsin, has expressed interest in developing the residential piece of the building, but is looking for a partner for the retail and office space. The next step will be to find that developer and start to put a plan together, Mr. Bowman said.

"The quality of the architecture in this building would help make the market come to it," said Brian Vandewalle, president and CEO of Vandewalle Associates, urban design consultants for Renew. "This is a building we cannot compromise architecture. Everybody is going to be at greater risk with an average building. And it's going to be expensive to make that kind of bold move."

Mr. Vandewalle described the project as an economic development initiative not "a real estate deal." The primary purpose of the building is to encourage business development and job creation.

Staff writer **Amy Rausch** can be reached at (309) 786-6441, Ext. 208.