

Schenectady County set to buy more land for aquatic center



Plans to build an aquatic center in Schenectady are moving forward after the county Legislature, SUNY Schenectady and the Adirondack Aquatic Center finalized a plan to being the 80,000-square-foot facility to the Electric City.

SCHENECTADY — Schenectady County is seeking to purchase another property on Erie Boulevard to facilitate the construction of a long-talked-about aquatic center.

The county's Committee on Economic Development and Planning on Monday advanced a resolution to purchase 151 Erie Blvd. for \$420,000, marking the latest development for the state-of-the-art swimming facility that has been discussed for more than a decade, gone through several proposed sites and has received millions in public support.

"This is hopefully the last piece of property that we will have to purchase for the aquatic center," County Attorney Christopher Gardner told lawmakers Monday.

The 2,992-square-foot lot is currently home to a two-story building that features a Boost Mobile store on the ground floor and an apartment on the upper level. Both tenants are on a month-to-month lease, according to contract between the county and 151 Erie Boulevard LLC, which owns the property.

Gardner said the building will be razed, noting the property is “an essential piece” for the project to move forward.

The full legislature is expected to approve the property acquisition at its business meeting next week. Funding for the purchase has already been budgeted for in the county’s 2025 capital budget, which set aside \$42 million for the aquatic center.

The aquatic center is expected to open in 2027 and will include an NCAA-compliant eight-lane pool and diving well, as well as an instruction pool, therapy pool and spectator seating for at least 1,200. Plans also call for seating for up to 600 athletes, locker rooms, restrooms, showers, multi-purpose instructional areas and concessions.

Plans to bring the aquatic center to downtown Schenectady were announced last year, when county lawmakers approved an agreement with SUNY Schenectady and the Adirondack Aquatic Center, the nonprofit originally behind plans for the swim center.

Under the agreement, the Adirondack Aquatic Center will devote 90% of the \$21.5 million in funds the organization raised since its inception more than a decade ago. SUNY Schenectady will own and operate the facility that will front Erie Boulevard on a swath of county-owned land between State, South Church, South Ferry and Full streets.

The community college is in the process of developing new programs around the center, which is also expected to host collegiate swim tournaments and other competitions and provide learn-to-swim and other events benefiting the community.

Prior to moving downtown, the aquatic center had signed a letter of intent to move to the ViaPort shopping mall in neighboring Rotterdam, but those plans fell through. The center was also expected to open at Mohawk Harbor, but those plans fell through due to space constraints. Developers had originally discussed opening the center in Malta when the project was first proposed.

The project has been heavily subsidized by public funding, including \$5 million from Schenectady County, \$5 million from the federal government and \$15 million from the state, including \$5 million secured by Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara, D-Rotterdam, and \$10 million through the NY SWIMS program last year.

The project was estimated to cost \$42 million, though county lawmakers are expected to amend the estimate to \$52 million after receiving the \$10 million in state funding. The change, which lawmakers are expected to approve next week, is being made at the request of the state’s Dormitory Authority, which is expected to reimburse 50% of eligible project costs through SUNY building aid.

“It’s not 10 million new dollars, it’s the New York SWIMS grant now incorporated into what we’re saying we have,” said Gary Hughes, chair of the Schenectady County Legislature.

Hughes said the project is still in development and is expected to be put out to bid later this year.

Asked about the public funding, Hughes noted that the Adirondack Aquatic Center has also provided funding and that the facility is expected to be in high demand.

“There’s really nothing like it in the region. There’s one in Buffalo but it doesn’t really match what we’re trying to do here,” he said. “And, there’s more than \$20 million in private investment here, too. This is not just public funds. We’re very much matching private investment, which is the way we always like to work.”