

Convention center could be on the horizon for downtown Tallahassee



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By Mariel Carbone | Posted: Wed 5:35 PM, Sep 19, 2018 | Updated: Thu 3:16 AM, Sep 20, 2018

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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (WCTV) – A new convention center could be on the horizon for downtown Tallahassee.

The joint city county Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency is considering allocating up to \$20 million in funding from the Blueprint 2020 sales tax for a joint project with Florida State University. The "Madison Mile Convention District," or the area between Doak and downtown, is the poised location.

The idea for the project dates back a few years.

Florida State University had been looking to enhance the area around the Civic Center since acquiring it in 2013 and deciding to relocate its College of Business. And, the Office of Economic Vitality had pinpointed a convention center as one of two major economic development projects that will be funded through the penny sales tax in 2020. The two are now considering collaborating on the project and expect it to grow tourism to the capital city.

"More visitors, more people shopping in local restaurants, more people spending in our community," said Ben Pingree, Director of PLACE.



According to a study done by Florida State University, the proposed convention center could have an annual \$17.7 million economic output. And, generate 188 jobs.

As for the partnership, OEV is asking FSU to commit to several minimum requirements for the project including the construction of a new full-service convention hotel offering 250-300 rooms, the construction of at least 50,000 square feet of convention space that can accommodate 750 to 1,000 attendees, adequate parking, a unified marketing and operations structure, and a cost-sharing agreement. All of this, to ensure the investment of tax dollars are worthwhile to the public.

In an email sent to Pingree, Kevin Graham, Executive Director of the Florida State University Real Estate Foundation, called these requirements, "appropriate goals for the project," but wrote, "until we have an updated study and commitment on timing of funding, we are unable to commit to minimum requirements."

Blueprint will meet for a workshop on Thursday, where it's expected to affirm the spending for the project. Once that happens, FSU, OEV and Blueprint will begin a study to look at what conference space already exists in the market, like the Civic Center, Turnbull Center, the new Loews Hotel and more. It'll also look at options for where the conference center could be built, what it could look like, and how much it would cost.

Graham has noted that FSU is committed to constructing a hotel, and if Blueprint does not commit the funding to the joint convention center project, it will continue building a hotel independently. However, he wrote to Pingree, "the opportunity to partner on a convention center development that builds on the platform of economic growth is appeal and remains a high priority for Florida State University."

Pingree said the project could be a game changer for Tallahassee.

"The convention center project, when it's built, is going to be a key stone, a corner stone, of that continued growth and redevelopment, and reinvestment, within the downtown Tallahassee Leon County, and it's extremely exiting," he said.

The workshop begins at 3 p.m. at City Hall.

Blueprint's regular meeting begins at 5.

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