

FRANKLIN SQUARE

I-81 widening halts plan for microbrewery, restaurant

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Hotelier Norm Swanson has put plans for a microbrewery and beer garden-style restaurant in Franklin Square on hold because of uncertainty over the proposed widening of Interstate 81 to within a few feet of his building.

Swanson said he cannot go forward with the \$6.6 million development until the state Department of Transportation makes a final decision on widening the highway and, if the widening happens, sets a timetable for the work.

He said the widening would not necessarily kill his project, but it could affect its timing and design.

"We're just in a holding pattern until they solidify what they're doing," he said.

Swanson announced plans in April 2016 to turn a former electric company building at 311 Genant Drive into a microbrewery, a beer garden-style restaurant and a tasting room featuring New York-made beers, wines and foods.

The project also would include an Onondaga Historical Association museum focused on the history of the many breweries once located in Syracuse.

Later phases of the project would include the construction of four apartments and 5,000 to 10,000 square feet of office space.

The state has thrown a monkey wrench into those plans, however.

Late last year, it announced plans to widen and straighten I-81 on the city's North Side.

As part of the widening, Genant Drive from Spencer Street to where it curves west just past Swanson's building would be closed to accommodate the widened highway.

That would put the high-speed highway just a few feet from what is now the front entrance to the building.

Swanson said he would have to consider making the entrance to his building on North Clinton Street.

"We will try to make it work," he said. "But until we see the final (highway) plan, it's really hard to plan."

The widening of the highway on the northern end of the city would be done in conjunction with the rebuilding or replacement of I-81 through downtown Syracuse.

The state is studying whether to rebuild and widen the elevated section of the highway where it passes through downtown or replace it with a ground-level boulevard or tunnel.

Under the state DOT's proposal, the widening of the highway on the North Side would be done no matter which plan is chosen for the elevated section of the highway further south.

Some North Side businesses and residents oppose the widening, saying it would unnecessarily put a busy highway too close to buildings.

In December, the Syracuse Common Council unanimously approved a resolution urging the state to drop its plans to widen the highway.



Developer Norm Swanson plans to turn the former Syracuse Lighting Co. headquarters at 311 Genant Drive in Syracuse's Franklin Square neighborhood into a beer garden restaurant, a microbrewery and a tasting room for New York beers, wines and foods.

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