

SYRACUSE



Developer Norm Swanson plans to turn the former Syracuse Lighting Co. headquarters in the Franklin Square neighborhood into a beer garden restaurant and microbrewery. Photos by Rick Moriarty/rmoriarty@syracuse.com

Developer clears liquor law hurdle

Franklin Square brewery, beer garden plan gets waiver

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Plans for a craft brewery, beer garden and restaurant in Syracuse's Franklin Square are moving ahead, thanks to a waiver to the state's liquor laws.

Developer Norm Swanson needed the waiver to proceed with his plans to develop the brewery and restaurant in the former Syracuse Lighting Co. headquarters at 311 Genat Drive.

The problem: State alcohol laws prohibit someone who operates retail businesses selling alcohol from also operating a brewery or other alcohol manufacturer. Those laws date to Prohibition.

Swanson owns four hotels that have retail liquor licenses: The Genesee Grande and the Parkview, both on East Genesee Street in Syracuse; the Hotel Skyler, on South Crouse Avenue near Syracuse University, and the Tailwater Lodge in Altmar, Oswego County.

The bill to exempt Swanson's project was signed Friday by Gov. Andrew Cuomo. It was spon-



sored by Assemblyman William Magnarelli (D-Syracuse) and Sen. John DeFrancisco (R-Syracuse).

In the "justification" section for the bill, the text reads: "Allowing this exemption will create a new tourism destination in the City of Syracuse, facilitate the redevelopment of a previously unused building, and encourage new economic activity in the City."

The German-style restaurant and "biergarten" will be named Light Works in honor of the building's past use. Syracuse Lighting Co., one of the predecessor companies to Niagara Mohawk Power Co., generated electricity for the city of Syracuse from 1895 to 1915. The site was later used as an elec-

tric distribution station.

Later phases of the \$6.6 million development will include the construction of four apartments and 5,000-to-10,000 square feet of office space. Swanson has said he plans to move some of his Woodbine Group offices to the building from East Fayette Street.

Plans for the building also include the creation of an Onondaga Historical Association museum focused on the history of the many breweries once located in Syracuse.

The red brick building, which overlooks Interstate 81, will be repainted and repairs made to its exterior.

In addition, a 2,200-square-foot atrium will be built as a grand entrance.

Swanson said he still hopes to open the brewery/restaurant in April 2017 but has more hurdles to clear. They include the state's plans to widen Interstate 81 — which is 23 feet from the side of the building.

In May, the Syracuse Industrial Development Agency approved \$181,000 worth of tax exemptions for Swanson's project. That includes a \$136,000 exemption from sales taxes on construction materials and a \$45,000 exemption from the state mortgage recording tax. Swanson did not request property tax exemptions.