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New Owensboro Grain office planned

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

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The drive for downtown development has landed its first private investment for new construction.

Jeff Erb, chief financial officer for Owensboro Grain Co., said the 103-year-old company that dominates the skyline at the eastern entrance to downtown will start construction soon on a two-story, 22,000-square-foot office building at 822 E. Second St.

The project will cost between \$2 million and \$5 million, he said.



This artist's rendering shows the eastern entrance of the new Owensboro Grain Co. office building.

"We consider this part of downtown," Erb said. "We were probably going to do this regardless of the plans for downtown development. But the timing is pretty good. The city fathers ought to be pleased with it."

"That's certainly good news," said Fred Reeves, the city's downtown development director. "That's on the fringe of downtown, but it's the entrance to downtown. Those folks have a good history of doing quality work."

"That'll be a nice improvement for that area," said County Commissioner Mike Riney. "Private investment is the 'wow' we need."

"That's fantastic," said City Commissioner David Johnson. "They've been a cornerstone of Owensboro business for a long time. They've always done things first class."

Reeves said the Owensboro Grain project joins the renovations of the Smith-Werner Building and the Miller House restaurant on a growing list of private investments downtown.

The city and county are planning \$79 million worth of construction in the downtown core area in the next couple of years in hopes of attracting more private investment.

"This was precipitated by the tornado in October 2007," Erb said. "We had to knock down the front of our office building because it was so badly damaged."

Instead of repairing the building that has been in use since 1980, he said, "We decided to take the insurance money to help pay for a new office building."

The new offices will replace a training center and a fitness center in old buildings on property that was home to Tapp Motors until 1988.

"We're going to position it diagonally to the street, facing traffic," Erb said. "It will look like people are going to drive into it. It's going to be a good welcome to traffic coming into Owens-boro."

The building will have a training center in the basement, he said.

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