

# Sides near agreement on convention center hotel

By Steve Vied, Messenger-Inquirer

Published: Friday, March 12, 2010 12:14 AM CST

Today marks two months since The Malcolm Bryant Corp. of Owensboro was selected as the "preferred developer" to build and operate a downtown Owensboro hotel. Since then, meetings between Owensboro officials and representatives of The Malcolm Bryant Corp. to hammer out a development agreement for the hotel have been ongoing.

Thursday, Downtown Development Director Fred Reeves, City Attorney Ed Ray and Bryant all said the negotiations are proceeding well, with an agreement expected soon but not before March 31, when the city and state are scheduled to close the deal for the city to acquire the state office building where the new hotel will sit.

Bryant's company is proposing to build a \$20 million, 150-room, five-to-seven story Hampton Inn & Suites hotel at Second and Frederica streets in downtown Owensboro.

Attached to the hotel will be a 75,000-square-foot convention and events center sporting a price tag of up to \$27 million.

The major incentive is that the land for the hotel be provided to the developer at no cost. Ultimately, the City Commission will have to approve the development agreement. Bryant also is requiring that a marketing and feasibility study be done for the convention and events center.

Ray said the timetable for reaching an agreement with Bryant will be driven by the City Commission, which will have to approve it, as well as Bryant.

Reeves said general agreement has been reached on most major items.

"Once the city takes ownership of the state office building, I think we will have an agreement very quickly," said Reeves.

Bryant said he agreed with Reeves and Ray that the negotiations on the development agreement are going well.

"I agree 100 percent," he said. "I don't see too many roadblocks. Everyone seems to want the private side to succeed and I want to see the public side succeed. We're going for a win-win. ... We're very excited. So far the discussions with the city and county have been super."

The feasibility study, already under way according to Bryant, is important to make sure the tourism market for the hotel and convention and events center exists, he said.

"No. 2, we have to make sure it's not a community center but a tourism draw, not primarily for local events," Bryant said. "The idea is for a destination site, where you get out and explore. We're not interested in locking people in a building. People have said you need eight to 10 signature venues. The hotel and convention center will be one or two of those. The RiverPark Center and the riverfront are others.

"No. 3, it needs to be acknowledged that (the convention/events center) needs to be well done. Competition is very strong now. ... Architecture, design, management and marketing are what we're looking for. We don't want to attach a first-class hotel to something just average. ... We're creating a landmark."

Bryant said he didn't know if up to \$27 million will be enough to build a suitable convention

and events center.

"If the feasibility study says \$20 million to \$30 million won't make it better than what other places have, there's no need to waste the money," he said.

Expanding the proposed hotel to include a residential component or other elements will depend on how much land the city will make available and what the city will allow, Bryant said.

"We think it will definitely be mixed use," he said.

**Steve Vied, 691-7297, [svied@messenger-inquirer.com](mailto:svied@messenger-inquirer.com)**