

Brick House owner comes to Douglassville

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By Denise Larive, News Writer

The owner of The Brick House Restaurant, 152 E. High Street, Pottstown, has plans to take an old restaurant building in the Douglassville area and make it new with an expansion and renovation for its opening next June.

David Walsh has purchased the former restaurant building that has been known over the years as Borelli's Family Restaurant, Gregory's, and Havana Joe's, at 668 Benjamin Franklin Highway East.

He appeared before the Amity Township Planning Commission on Nov. 10 and asked advice on how to obtain the fastest final approval so that he can start construction by March and open in June.

Walsh has retained Brian Boyer of Boyer Engineering, Douglassville, to prepare a sketch plan for renovating the building into a 6,200 square foot restaurant with 160 to 170 seats (and dining rooms for private parties), a separate bar room, an outside dining deck, outside access for smoking and improved patron restrooms.

"Perception is very important," said Walsh. "The site is less than aesthetically pleasing now. The only reason people are going to stop is if it looks good. The first thing we're going to do is improve the parking lot, façade, and sign. We're now trying to determine building permit or land development."

"We need to make an impact from the beginning," said Walsh. "I will spend money to make the impact we need to make and will pave more area."

He said the size of the restaurant will be dependent upon money and the time frame; he is prepared to scale back his expansion plans if they would require land development.

"My goal is certain criteria to be a successful restaurant with additional rooms, smoking access outside, and a deck on the other side," said Walsh. "I want to separate the bar from the restaurant with a hallway so there is restaurant access without going through the bar."

Walsh opened The Brick House Restaurant in March 2008 with 156 seats and 5,165 square feet in the former First Fidelity Bank building that was built in 1880.

The restaurant has high ceilings and big windows evocative of an old bank, but, he said, the biggest problem is that rooms can't be separated for private parties.

That ability is included in his expansion plans for his newest restaurant in Douglassville.

"It is in everyone's best interests to open the biggest and best restaurant possible," said township Solicitor Brian F. Boland. "You need to decide what you want to do, present it to us, and we'll tell you

whether you need land development.”

Boland said the land development plan for Reading Hospital’s 60,000 square foot building was approved by the township in 75 days.

Planning commission members said they are willing to hold previously advertised workshop sessions on Nov. 25 and Dec. 23 to provide Walsh with sufficient township reviews and approvals.

Boyer will determine what can be accommodated on the current paved area and if the site’s approximate 95 to 100 parking spaces meet the zoning requirement of one parking space for every two dining seats.

He said increasing the impervious coverage for a larger building and additional parking spaces would most likely require a land development plan.

Earth disturbance of more than 5,000 square feet would also require a land development plan with an approved Erosion and Sedimentation Control Plan.

“Our first criteria is cost,” said Walsh. “If it needs to go to land development, we will scale back. After tonight’s meeting, now we know what we have to do.”