

# Beloit College eyes riverfront project

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## Photo



Angus-Young Associates

An illustration shows what Beloit College hopes to do with the Blackhawk Generating Station on Rock River in downtown Beloit. The college is hoping to raise \$30 million from private donors to make the plan happen.

## Photo



Trevor Johnson

The Blackhawk Generating Station in downtown Beloit. Beloit College's Center for the Sciences and the cupola of Middle College, the main administration building, are visible in the background, right.

## Photo



Angus-Young Associates

A rendering of the proposed green roof space, with the fitness center level (and track) visible above.

BELOIT — A major project that would give yet another boost to Beloit's riverfront is in the works.

Beloit College says it is hoping to raise \$30 million from private donors to renovate a defunct power plant along the river near the college.

If the money can be raised, the private college would take over the Blackhawk Generating Station, which sits on the Rock River just across Riverside Drive/Highway 51 from the college's campus.

"There is a lot of work to be done on our part to see if this is a project we can make happen—a partnership we can make happen—but we're excited about it," said Jason Hughes, Beloit College spokesman.

The building would feature a pedestrian bridge from the college over Riverside Drive to the power plant, which would be renovated for use as a college activity and recreation center.

The building has about 120,000 square feet of usable space, according to a college news release.

The college's board of trustees gave the go-ahead this month, but preliminary architectural plans by Angus-Young Associates are already in hand, as is a survey of students and staff about uses for the building, Hughes said.

Hughes told The Gazette that no timeline has been set, but the college should know within the next two years whether donors are willing to back the project.

"If we are successful, Beloit and Beloit College will gain a landmark on the river that will celebrate the industrial history of this city while providing the college with a building that will be the envy of every small college in the country," said college President Scott Bierman in the news release.

"Wisconsin Power and Light Company, an Alliant Energy Co., is excited to be partnering with Beloit College and working through the details of a potential agreement for the Blackhawk site," said Patricia Kampling, Alliant chairman, president and CEO, also quoted in the release.

The survey identified desires of students and staff that included an indoor track; fitness center; a flexible, field house-style "big open space;" a lecture and movie hall seating about 150; and spaces that take advantage of the river views and access the site naturally affords.

A boathouse or other on-the-river activities are unlikely, however, because of safety concerns, Hughes said. The power plant sits close to a downstream dam.

The thinking is that boating or other river activities could be developed for college use at Riverside Park, which is

north of the power plant, Hughes said.

An upper floor would be expanded so it could house an indoor running track, Hughes said.

The track would be 175 meters long, which is 25 meters short of what would be needed for a competition facility in the Midwest Conference, Hughes said.

Plans include a "green" roof, competition pool, wellness center, top-floor event space and numerous student activity venues and lounges.

Hughes said the college could build a new recreation center on land it owns, but a new building would not provide as much space as the old power plant, nor would it provide river access.

Beloit College officials have long wanted to expand to the nearby river, Hughes acknowledged. He noted that many historical photos show students using the river, something that is less true today.

"As our president has said, we have always been a river college, to a great extent, without a foothold on the river, so this offers us an opportunity to do that," Hughes said.

"While renovations would be extensive, we want to keep as much as we can," Hughes said. "What's there is what makes it so appealing to us, and certainly, we think, to potential donors.

"The building has great 'bones,' and, we think, a distinctive façade."

Hughes said environmental remediation is expected to be part of the project.

The building was a coal-fired power plant until 1986, when it started burning natural gas, according to Gazette records. It ceased operations in 2010.

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