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Historic Bellevue Biltmore Hotel's fate tied to new use study

Rehab, renew or raze? Some tough decisions ahead

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BELLEAIR — For its historic architecture and colorful past, many consider the **Bellevue Biltmore Hotel** a jewel of Belleair. But in recent years the hotel has been more like a hot potato, passed between owners, shuttering in 2009 and falling into disrepair.

Now, the property's new owner Kawa Capital Management LLC has devised a solution to determine the best use of the well-situated 22-acre property and bring together various factions that have debated it.

Kawa, which bought the mortgage on the property for \$8 million in December, will fund an independent feasibility study through the town of Belleair to examine the economic impact of future hotel operations as well as possible alternate uses of the site.

"Different uses will attract different investors, so it's important to have the study done first," said **Matt Cummings**, a consultant working for Kawa and principal of construction management firm Klecker Cummings LLC.

The Belleair Town Commission approved the study May 17 and the town issued an RFP for a consulting firm May 24. The town will accept bid proposals until June 9.

The timeframe, who invests in the property and the level of investment all hinge on the results. The findings will affect owners of nearby condos and houses as well as taxes collected on the property.

Clear options

Belleair Mayor **Gary Katica** said he sees three likely outcomes for the property: The developer could restore the hotel, restore part of the hotel and build around it or bring down the hotel.

“When we get the report back, either we will rejoice or we will be absolutely distraught,” Katica said. “The last thing you want is to see [one of the largest] wooden structures in the world torn down.”

Belleair’s comprehensive plan and town charter, in addition to the hotel’s listing on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places, afford the property certain protections, said **Truett Gardner**, a partner specializing in real estate and land use with Gardner Brewer Martinez-Monfort PA in Tampa.

“There are strict guidelines – when you have a historical structure like this – on the appropriate ways to rehab it and make sure you are maintaining the historical significance,” Gardner said.

Cummings, whose resume includes the Lincoln Road development near Miami Beach’s Art Deco District, said he and Kawa are committed to retaining as much of the history “as humanly possible.”

Still, if the structure remained a hotel, it would face significant challenges.

Its location in the town and not on the water is not typical and the hotel’s golf course is more than a mile way.

Plus, a large hotel faces far more competition than it did 10 years ago.

Whether or not the structure is economically viable as a hotel is one of the questions the study will answer. Kawa may agree or disagree with the results, and so may the town, but the study should produce ideas that work, Cummings said.

“That is what the study is going to tell us: If it’s feasible, if it can work,” he said.

SCOPE OF WORK: To view the RFP, visit: <http://bizj.us/b2knf>

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