

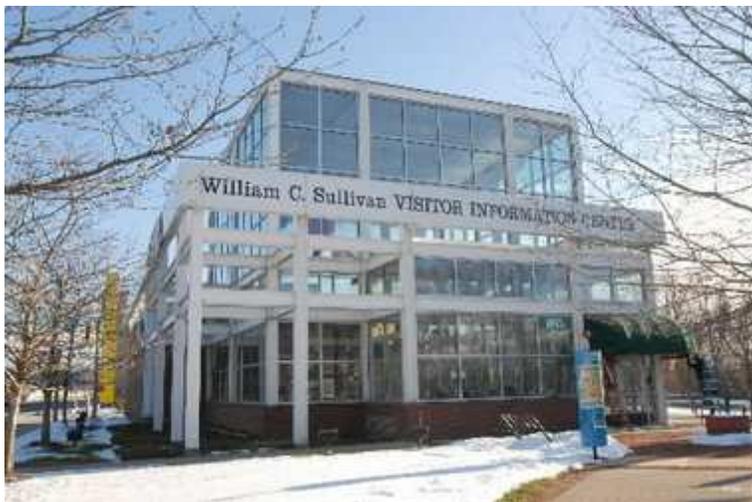


LUXE Burger Bar named preferred developer for former Springfield Visitor Information Center building

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By **Peter Goonan, The Republican**



File photo | The Republican

The former Springfield Visitor Information Center.

SPRINGFIELD – The Springfield Redevelopment Authority has selected a preferred developer for the former **Visitor Information Center**, which is proposing a \$2.3 million investment to convert the riverfront site to a **LUXE Burger Bar** patterned after a Rhode Island restaurant.

The development team chosen, Lustra LLC, includes local lawyer and developer Raipher D. Pellegrino and partners from Providence, R.I., with experience in the restaurant industry.

Under its proposal, Lustra will purchase the property from the authority for \$450,001, which was the highest price offered among the two

proposals received. The developers said they expect the business will create 40 full-time jobs, 47 part-time jobs, and \$96,250 in annual tax revenue for the city.

The site is on Hall of Fame Avenue, also known as West Columbus Avenue, off Interstate 91 and abutting the Connecticut River.

The second developer, Peter J. Pappas, owner of the adjacent LA Fitness property, and his company, Alliance Converting Machinery Inc., offered \$223,024 for the vacant site, also for a restaurant use. In addition, they were seeking a tax increment financing agreement with the city that would reduce the annual taxes.

The William C. Sullivan Tourist Information Center relocated in November 2009 to the nearby Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, leaving the city-owned property vacant. The city transferred the site to the authority, which first invited lease proposals, and then offered the site for sale in August.

One of Pellegrino's partners, John Elkay, operates six restaurants in Providence under the Chow Fun Food Group which includes Harry's Bar & Burger, Rick's Roadhouse, Cafe Noir, 10 Steak & Sushi, LUXE Burger Bar and Veritas. The other partner is Richard L. Brady of Providence and the resident manager is listed as Jennifer Stefanik.

Armando Feliciano, chairman of redevelopment authority, which serves as the city's urban development agency, said the authority is "excited and happy" to have a preferred developer chosen. The two years to find the developer "was worth the wait," he said.

The authority voted unanimously to select Lustra as preferred developer for a 120-day period, as was recommended by a review committee.

"We are excited that an experienced local developer has stepped forward to develop the property to bring new activity, new jobs and new tax revenue to our riverfront area," Mayor **Domenic J. Sarno** said in a prepared statement. "This restaurant group has several successful locations in Providence. The selection of Springfield as their first city for expansion shows great confidence in the opportunities to invest here."

Lustra's proposal includes some demolition work and some expansion work to the 4,100 square foot building, with a new mezzanine space added.

The proposal filed by Pappas was for two tenants: a family restaurant and bar named "Fergburger," which he said he discovered on a family trip to New Zealand; and a special coffee and dessert tenant.

However, in November, Pappas said he was teaming up with a Boston group that was hoping to open a **Jerry Remy's Sports Bar & Grill** at the visitor center. City officials, however, said the review was limited to the proposals already received.

Pappas said he will continue looking in the region for a site for the Remy restaurant proposal, and wishes Lustra LLC great success at the visitor center site, as his neighbor.

If the sale and development proceeds, the redevelopment authority will use the proceeds as part of its operating budget which pays for expenses such as maintenance, insurance, and snow removal, for authority-owned properties, said Somalid Hogan, project manger for the city's Office of Planning and Economic Development.

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