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City planners to see Wright project

Business First of Buffalo - by [James Fink](#)

The first glimpse at the next phase of the \$15 million Buffalo Transportation/Pierce-Arrow Museum project will be presented early next week.

Museum founder and developer James Sandoro will be meeting with the **Buffalo Planning Board** on Tuesday morning seeking approval on facade work on the existing Seneca Street facility. The work is a prelude to what Sandoro hopes is a fall construction start up of an 80,000-square-foot expansion that will be highlighted by building a Frank Lloyd Wright-designed late 1920s filling station.

“The facade will match the new building that is going up and replace the hodge podge we have now on the outside,” Sandoro said.

The facade will have an early 20th century look that ties in with the museum’s historical base.

The planning board meeting will be the initial Buffalo City Hall review of the museum’s expansion. Sandoro did present a sneak preview one month ago at a meeting of **Buffalo Place Inc.**

Sandoro, who acquired the rights to build the Wright-designed filling station several years ago, originally planned to build outside of the museum. Wright has designed the station for a local businessman who wanted to construct the building along Michigan Avenue near what is now the Kensington Expressway. The plans remained on the books for many decades until Sandoro, a history and automobile buff, discovered them.

Several factors came into play that ultimately caused the developer to switch the blueprint and move the station indoors. Among them: concerns that the stations’s wide wing span would have run the risk of being heavily and routinely damaged by prevailing winds that blow along Seneca Street.

In addition, Wright had designed two 40-foot tall copper poles for the station that some had feared would only serve as a lightning conduit during thunderstorms.

The re-designed museum expansion will now be at least 60-feet tall to accommodate the filling station and have it built as Wright designed the structure.

Keeping the station inside will make the museum more of a 12-month attraction and also serve as a major backdrop for corporate and privately-catered events.

The museum currently attracts about 10,000 visitors annually and has hosted more than 400 private events.

Sandoro also confirmed he is lobbying Gov. Paterson’s office for approximately \$8 million in federal economic stimulus funds to help underwrite the museum’s expansion. The museum would be considered a qualified project under the stimulus package guidelines.

“If we get it, it will speed up our development and get it finished quicker,” Sandoro said.

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