

South Bend invests in WNIT building City will spend \$1 million from Tax Increment Financing district fund.



The WNIT building on Jefferson Boulevard will have a three-story glass atrium and space for community meetings. WNIT will renovate and move into the present WSBT-TV building in downtown South Bend. Courtesy of the Troyer Group of Mishawaka

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SOUTH BEND -- The city is investing \$1 million to help WNIT pay for a facade when it moves downtown later this year.

The money will go toward the facade, which will include a three-story glass atrium.

During Friday's Redevelopment Commission meeting, WNIT officials said the atrium and some other first-floor spaces will be community spaces for events and meetings.

City planner Jennifer Laurent said the money will come from the downtown Tax Increment Financing district fund.

WNIT, a public television station now based in Elkhart, will be moving to 300 W. Jefferson Blvd., the current home of WSBT-TV. WSBT is moving to Mishawaka. The station is owned by Schurz Communications, the parent company that also owns The Tribune. Troyer Group architect Gary Cole said the north and east end of the buildings will be redone with new windows and doors. The corner facing the intersection of Jefferson and Lafayette boulevards will be demolished to build the atrium, which will have a contemporary look. The satellite dishes on the roof of the building will be painted different colors, to make it look more attractive from the street. Two Jumbotron video screens will be placed on the glass of the atrium.

"It will give South Bend that Times Square look," Cole said. "We're pretty excited by it all. It's kind of a revolutionary design for us."

WNIT's overall investment is \$6.5 million, which includes the city funding. WNIT general manager Mary Pruess said the station wants to increase public outreach and awareness, and it is hoped this space will encourage that.

"The whole first floor is really what we think of as our public space," she said.

The community room can be used for town meetings, training and other activities. Pruess said the lobby can be used for events such as small concerts. It's really about bringing the community together to talk about issues and engage people in problem solving, she said, through both "the physical facility and the electronic kinds of outreach we will be doing." The timeline for when construction takes place, Pruess said, will depend on when WSBT is ready to move. She said WSBT is anticipating a move this fall. Construction will be dependent on the weather and construction contracts, she said, which means it could take up to a year before the building is ready for WNIT. WNIT expects to move there in fall 2009.

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