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Bank branch to replace furniture store

by **BRIAN NADIG**

Belmont Bank and Trust plans to open a branch with a drive-through facility by the end of the year on the former site of the Smithe and Shanahan furniture store at the northeast corner of Belmont and Linder avenues.

"It will enhance that corner, the neighborhood and all of Belmont Avenue," said Belmont Bank president and chief executive officer William McCarty III. "We are a locally owned bank, (and) we're excited about investing back into our community."

The one-story bank would be the first satellite location for Belmont, which opened its main facility at 8250 W. Belmont Ave. in 2006. The branch would consist of a 2,000-

square-foot building at the corner with three drive-through lanes east of the building.

Belmont-Central Chamber of Commerce executive director Amy Kamykowski said that the bank will bring much-needed revitalization to the Belmont-Linder intersection. Kamykowski said that the furniture store building has been vacant for 5 years and that plans to build a retail-residential project on a vacant lot at the northwest corner of the intersection have stalled.

The Zoning Board of Appeals is scheduled to hold a hearing on the proposal at its meeting at 9 a.m. Friday, June 18, at in the City Council Chamber at City Hall, 121 N. LaSalle St. The B3-1 zoning of the site allows a bank, but a special

use permit is required for a drive-through facility.

The board approved a similar request for a drive-through for the 9,400-square-foot site more than a year ago, but delays in the project mean that Belmont must reapply for a special use before a building permit can be issued. Tentative plans call for the former furniture store, 5452-58 W. Belmont Ave., to be demolished this summer.

Under the bank's proposal, there would be an entrance and exit for

vehicles off Linder, while users of the drive-through would exit onto westbound Belmont, with left turns to eastbound Belmont prohibited, McCarty said. Plans also call for the reconstruction of the diagonal parking area on the east side of Linder, he said.

Belmont currently has 20 employees and plans to hire about five additional workers for the branch, McCarty said. About a third of the bank's work force speaks at least two languages, he said.