

First concrete details about the opening of a brand new hotel in Salem emerged during a meeting last week when Mayor David Bower confirmed their partnership with Cobblestone and that construction is expected to begin this fall. "We've been working on this for the last seven years," Bower said, speaking about the City's attempts to make a new hotel in Washington County a reality.

Rumblings about the possibility have been circulating at City Hall recently, but this is the first official announcement about the project. Greg Fitzloff, Community Development and Marketing Director of the City, added that the new hotel is one of several major projects the City hinted at earlier this year.

Cobblestone's developer John Seibert, Vice President of Development at BriMark Builders, was in town for the announcement and followed up the reveal with a brief presentation about what they're bringing to Washington County.

Cobblestone looks for communities that are under served by the hotel industry when they consider a new location, and Seibert said Salem fit the bill perfectly. "I couldn't be more pleased with the embracement I got from the City." He thanked the Mayor, Fitzloff, and many other City officials, stating they've all been "extremely helpful" getting the project up and running.

Seibert was preparing to take a scouting tour of potential Indiana locations when he received a call from Fitzloff informing him of Washington County's interest in being considered. "Salem went to the top of the list after that," he recalled. "I was planning on going from the north part of the state on down, but I decided to go south to north, starting in Salem."

Cobblestone, headquartered in Neenah, Wis., currently has 25 hotels in operation, with 10 more under construction, and a projected goal of 50 fully operational hotels by the end of 2015. They started up back in 2008.

The company already has facilities in Illinois, Michigan and Kansas, among other Midwestern and Great Plains states, and have plans to expand further west into Colorado and Texas. The Salem hotel will be the very first Cobblestone in Indiana.

The two-story, forty-four guest room facility will be constructed on a vacant plot of locally owned land along E. Hackberry Street. Some of the services and luxuries visitors can expect include a continental breakfast, a meeting space, a laundromat, a beer and wine bar, exercise and computer rooms, and an indoor swimming pool.

Seibert described their hotels as "more upscale" places and compared Cobblestones to a Holiday Inn Express. He added they have a policy of hiring locally and put an emphasis on running clean, safe hotels. "We pride ourselves on being a part of your community."

Several community leaders joined in on the celebration, hailing this partnership as a big leap for economic development and tourism in the county.

"Much of the impetus for this project came from this group," Marji Morris, Co-Director of Awareness Washington County, said to the civic and community leaders in attendance. She said there's been talk of building a new hotel in Salem for decades and it's a testament to the community's determination that this wish is finally coming true.

Piper Flight Museum Director Lowell DePoy, who sits on the Washington County Tourism

Board, said Cobblestone has become a key player in marketing Salem outside of the county, and the hotel should give tourism a much needed boost.

Fitzoff said he was proud of the unifying spirit that brought many of Salem's departments and organizations together to help realize this project. "It's fun to work on a project like this that challenges many different groups to come together," he said. "And they managed to come together and get things done."

A groundbreaking ceremony is expected to be held in six to eight weeks, followed by a six month period of construction. The hotel is tentatively expected to open for business in the latter part of March 2014.

For more information on Cobblestone Hotels, visit www.staycobblestone.com.