

Village Hall offer too good to refuse

Written by CAROL POMEDAY
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Officials say building could spur development that benefits everyone

Belgium village officials told about a dozen people at a public forum Saturday that after addressing concerns raised at the last meeting, they are convinced the best thing for the village is to accept the \$600,000 donation from Mike and John Ansay to build a new Village Hall in the New Luxembourg development.

“We had our attorney and financial adviser saying we would be fools not to do this,” Trustee Jason Acevedo said.

“We see this as a way to kick-start development. The upside is great. The downside is minimal. And either way, we’re left with a new Village Hall.”

Trustee Vickie Boehnlein added, “My mind is not to throw away a \$1 million donation because we’re afraid of incurring a little more expense.”

The donation comes close to \$1 million because Ansay is donating the lot for the structure and after building the Village Square will turn that over to the village, she said.

“The village square without any buildings on it is worth \$250,000,” Village President Richard Howells said.

Howells and Acevedo vowed they will not spend one cent over \$600,000 on the hall.

But resident Jerry Prom was wary of the gift.

“Who thinks that’s a \$1 million donation with everything that went on behind closed doors on Dec. 21?” Prom asked. “What about the cost for a new lift station?”

Howells said the board met in closed session that day with their attorney and financial adviser to go over a revised developer’s agreement for New Luxembourg proposed by Mike Ansay while Ansay and Neil Tiziani, director of real estate for Ansay Development Corp., waited in an adjacent room.

The developer’s agreement is available at Village Hall for anyone to read, he said.

“I think it’s realistic to think, ‘Are we getting duped?’” Boehnlein said. “We did, too. That’s why we asked so many questions.

“Yes, we did agree to build the lift station, but we don’t know when we’re going to need it. If we need it, that’s good. I hope we need it.”

The other concession was to keep the tax incremental district open until 2022, the longest time allowed by the state, she said. The village had hoped to close it early, she said.

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However, all projects funded by the district must be completed by 2017.

Howells said 26 houses would have to be built in the subdivision to require a new lift station, which would serve older parts of the village as well.

“What does this do for Mike Ansay? He hopes it will spur development around the village square,” Howells said.

“There is not a single business person I know who’s willing to go into a project expecting a loss.”

Acevedo said he hopes the village puts in a new lift station because he doesn’t want anyone else to have sewer back-ups like the ones he had in his basement.

“I hope Mike Ansay makes a ton of money and brings some of that money into the community,” Acevedo said.

Boehnlein agreed, saying, “I’m not here to get in the way of business people who want to develop to make money.”

The village square will be similar to those in Luxembourg and other European countries with a lot of green space in the center, Howells said.

The Village Hall will be on the southeast side, the Luxembourg American Cultural Center on the east side, a community building on the northeast side and retail businesses on the west side.

“The center green space could be a recessed area with a splash pool,” Boehnlein said. “It would be a place for people to sit. Outdoor concerts could be held there.”

Acevedo said, “We’re not forgetting that there are other open spaces in the village. We’re hoping that this is a catalyst that makes people want to come into this community and develop things. It’s not just Ansay’s development that will benefit.”

Resident Wayne Wetzel questioned if the new building will cost more to operate since it will be twice the size of the current office.

Howells said the new structure will be more energy efficient, meet the needs of a growing community and be able to handle technology demands.

The current office space at 135 Commerce St. is 1,500 square feet and is in a building shared with the Belgium Fire Department.

When residents were surveyed about what to do with the building, the majority wanted the village to maintain ownership of the structure. Only 46 of 500 surveys were returned.

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“It was clear not just from the votes but also from the comments to us that people were strongly opposed to giving it to the fire department,” Boehnlein said. “It was decided to keep it and rent it to the Town of Belgium and fire department.”

If the Town of Belgium decides not to rent the space, Acevedo said, a private tenant will be sought.

“Our goal is to make this building expense neutral,” he said. “Our expenses will be covered by the rent.”

Resident Kate Aikens, whose husband is a member of the Plan Commission, said it appears to her the Ansays want to leave a legacy to the village.

Howells said the Village Board will make a decision on the donation at its May 13 meeting and start the process to rezone the land from commercial to institutional use.

The board will hire RLD Architecture to design the plans for Village Hall, which will follow the pattern book of Luxembourg architectural features and designs created for the development.

Those plans will then be used to seek bids, Howells said.

Village staff have been meeting with RLD to design the interior, he said. The Ansays will design the exterior.

The goal is to have a groundbreaking ceremony during Luxembourg Fest week, Howells said, with completion next spring.

It was decided to have quarterly public forums to update residents on the Village Hall and discuss any other issues.