

City, developer call off downtown parking lot swap

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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<http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/032113/parkingSM.png> **Trade would have resulted in additional public parking spaces, but questions about location, contamination linger**

A proposed parking lot swap between the City of Port Washington and downtown developer Dan Ewig that would have increased the number of public parking spaces downtown is no longer on the table, officials said Tuesday.

“At the end of the day, despite our best efforts, we weren’t able to come to an agreement,” Mayor Tom Mlada said following a closed session of the Common Council Tuesday night. “It wasn’t for a lack of effort. We tried.”



Mlada said negotiations with Ewig continued throughout last weekend. In the end, he said, Ewig decided it was best to retain the former M&I Bank drive-through property instead of swapping it for the city-owned parking lot behind the Boerner Mercantile Building he is renovating.

“Dan felt, based on the needs of his tenants, that it was best he stay put,” Mlada said. “It affords him the greatest flexibility to meet his needs.”

Mlada would not go into detail about the factors that led to the decision, saying, “There were a number of different things.”

Ewig could not be reached for comment Wednesday morning.

However, aldermen were originally expected to take up an amendment to the agreement to swap the lots that would have required Ewig to escrow 150% of the projected cost of remediating his property. If the cost exceeded that amount, Ewig would be required to either cover the remaining cost or he could opt out of the agreement.

Aldermen did not take up that item, instead going into closed session.

Afterward, the Common Council authorized City Attorney Eric Eberhardt to put in writing the fact that the deal has fallen through and send it to Ewig’s attorney for a signature.

Just because the deal has fallen through for now doesn’t mean the parties can’t renegotiate again later, Mlada noted.

Ewig had proposed the parking lot swap last year. Although the deal was to have been

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completed last month, city officials sought an environmental study of the former M&I Bank lot after learning it had once been home to a car repair shop.

The study showed that the amount of contamination on the property was small, officials said, but they asked Ewig to delay finalizing the swap while the Department of Natural Resources reviewed the results of the study.

No money would have changed hands as part of the deal, but both properties would have been upgraded to create more attractive and user-friendly parking, officials said.

The city-owned lot between the Boerner Mercantile Building and Associated Bank has 44 parking stalls and is primarily used by downtown employees.

The former drive-through, which is across the street from the city lot, currently has 44 parking places, but after the building is razed could be reconfigured to have 69 parking stalls, officials said.

The property exchange agreement calls for the city to raze the former bank building by Dec. 21, 2014, and use the lot for parking for 10 years.

Ewig would also have been required to use the former city lot as a parking lot, according to the agreement.

Image Information: A PROPOSED DEAL called for the city to trade its parking lot south of Washington Street (foreground) for one north of Washington (background) at the site of a former bank drive-through. Photo by Bill Schanen IV