

City sets special meeting on coal dock leases

Written by Kristyn Halbig Ziehm
Wednesday, 19 January 2011 18:44

Port council will review proposed agreements with We Energies to provide access to lakefront property

The Port Washington Common Council on Tuesday agreed to hold a special meeting next week to review the proposed leases for the coal dock.

The council tabled a review set for Tuesday night after learning attorneys for both We Energies and the city had not yet finalized the documents.

“We’ve been going back and forth. We’re about this close,” City Administrator Mark Grams said, holding his fingers about an inch apart.

Grams told aldermen that if the lease documents are not ready for review by Friday, the special meeting tentatively set for Tuesday, Jan. 25, will be cancelled.

If that occurs, the council may review the documents at its Feb. 2 meeting. However, Grams will not be at that meeting and City Attorney Eric Eberhardt recommended the council hold its review when the city administrator is present.

Ald. Burt Babcock questioned whether the lease will tie the city to having a bird sanctuary on the south coal dock.

The sanctuary, Grams said, is part of an agreement We Energies has with state and federal agencies.

The main issue with the south dock is related to any future expansion of the power plant, Grams said.

“What we’re saying (in terms of the south dock) is we want a path going through there,” he said. “They’ve assured us there will be a pathway.”

If the path built by the city must be moved because of a power plant expansion project, it will done be the utility’s cost, Grams said.

The city, We Energies and the state have been working on the leases for more than a year, even as the city completed work on a plan to develop the coal dock into a lakefront recreational

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center for the community.

The leases are required because the coal dock was created by filling in the lakebed in the 1930s, when We Energies needed an area for freighters to unload the coal that fueled its power plant.

Since the dock is no longer needed by the utility, ownership reverts to the state. We Energies, which has riparian rights to the property, will lease the 20 acres from the state and sublet the land to the city.