

Historic firehouse goes on the market

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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City to list building with local real estate firm for \$249,900, give Historical Society two weeks to bid

The Port Washington Common Council Tuesday agreed to list the historic firehouse with Re/Max United with an asking price of \$249,900.

The firm was one of two the city considered to market the building at the corner of Pier and Wisconsin streets in downtown. The other was Grubb Ellis of Milwaukee.

"They're pretty equal," Randy Tetzlaff, the city's director of planning and development, told aldermen of the two firms' proposals. "The marketing is identical, really. One is local. One has a little bit more of a national reputation."

Re/Max United, which is based in Port Washington, proposed a 6% commission, adding that the sale price would likely be "a lot less," Tetzlaff said.

Grubb Ellis had proposed an asking price of \$225,000 for the property, but noted that the sale price would likely be between \$175,000 and \$199,000 because of the required mechanical updates and maintenance issues. Its commission would have been 7%.

City Administrator Mark Grams said that it may serve the city well to go with Grubb Ellis.

"We've already tried locally to sell the building," he said.

But aldermen spoke unanimously in favor of listing the property with Re/Max United, a local firm.

Ald. Joe Dean made the motion to list the property with Re/Max, specifying there would be a two-week period during which the Port Washington Historical Society could come forward with a bid for the property. Re/Max's commission would be reduced to 2.4% if the society successfully negotiated a purchase by then.

"I think 14 days is plenty of time given that they've had ample time to discuss this," Dean said. "The writing has been on the wall for a long, long time."

The Historical Society has long been interested in acquiring the building for use as a museum and offices. Its officials have asked the city to retain ownership of the property and lease it to the group for a nominal annual fee.

Ald. Jim Vollmar, who cast the lone ballot against listing the building, said Re/Max officials may have more success coming up with a workable plan for the Society to purchase the building.

"Tom Didier (of Re/Max) may have some ideas they could use," he said.

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Vollmar said his vote against the listing contract reflects his belief the city should not sell the historical building.

“I think it’s an asset to the community,” Vollmar said, adding he would like to see the Port Washington Historical Society take control of the building, either through a lease or purchase.

“I’d rather see the Historical Society succeed in its goal of making the city a historic attraction,” he said. “I just came back from Europe, and over there it’s all about museums and historic places.”

The sale of the historic firehouse is the last part of a complex deal the city made to keep Franklin Energy, a successful business, in the community. The firm is leasing the top floor of the Smith Bros. Marketplace building and renting its former home on Foster Street to the city, which converted it into the new senior center.

A key to making that deal work was the plan that the city would sell the former senior center — the historic firehouse — and use the proceeds to offset the cost.