

Sale talks for former firehouse heat up

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Port officials continue negotiating with potential buyers interested in historic Pier Street building

City of Port Washington officials are still negotiating with two parties that are interested in buying the historic firehouse at the corner of Wisconsin and Pier streets.

The Common Council met to consider two offers to purchase the building last week, but took no action on the offers, City Administrator Mark Grams said.

“We’re getting close,” he said.

The city and buyers have been trading offers and counteroffers for the past week or two, officials said.

“It’s still pretty much up in the air, but it’s definitely a positive development,” Mayor Scott Huebner said, noting the council could meet again to discuss the offers late this week or during Tuesday’s Common Council meeting. “Both (uses of the building) would be good for Port Washington.”

Randy Tetzlaff, the city’s director of planning and development, said a local party would use the structure as a commercial and retail property. The other party wants it for commercial, retail and residential uses, he said.

The historic firehouse, which is being marketed for \$249,900 by Re/Max United, is on both the national and state Registers of Historic Places.

The building at 102 E. Pier St. was designed by Milwaukee architect John Topzant and built in 1929 with tan brick walls, a Spanish tile roof, copper gutters and downspouts and the distinctive bell-tower-like hose drying tower.

Between 1929 and 1938, a matching addition was built to the rear of the structure.

The distinctive Mediterranean Revival-style building served as the city’s fire station until 1975, when it was converted to a senior center.

The sale of the building was a key part of the city’s strategy in keeping Franklin Energy in the community.

To help ensure the company would move its headquarters to the top floor of Smith Bros. Marketplace on Franklin Street, the city leased the company’s former home in what used to be St. John’s Church at 403 W. Foster St.

The city moved the senior center to the Foster Street location during the summer.

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City officials have counted on money from the sale of the historic firehouse to offset the cost of the lease and renovations to the former church.

In the meantime, the Port Washington Historical Society sought to lease the building from the city for a nominal annual rent in order to develop a museum there. Although officials were willing to sell the property to the society, they stressed that they need the proceeds from the sale and hope to have the building placed on the tax rolls.

The city gave the Historical Society an opportunity to buy the building before opening it for sale to the public.

Before marketing the building through Re/Max, aldermen attempted to sell the historic firehouse, which includes one row of parking in the adjoining lot, through a bidding process. That failed when no one bid on the structure.