

Where's the tower plan?

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
Wednesday, 29 February 2012 19:18

Port officials haven't heard for weeks from group that wanted to build 80-foot-tall structure in Upper Lake Park

A proposal to build an observation tower in Port Washington's Upper Lake Park overlook area was advancing at a rapid pace earlier this year, but it has abruptly dropped out of sight.

City officials withheld action on the proposal in January because representatives of the Friends of the Tower and their contractor could not attend the Common Council meeting.

Since then, communications between the city and the group have been virtually non-existent, City Administrator Mark Grams said.

"We haven't heard a word," he said.

Port Washington businessman Pat Poole, a spokesman for the group, failed to return calls seeking information on the status of the tower.

The Friends of the Tower has proposed raising between \$300,000 and \$500,000 to build the 80-foot-tall tower as a gift to the city.

The structure would be an attraction for residents and visitors alike, Poole said, offering views that people can't get anywhere else. The park was selected as a site because it is visible and, as one of the city's highest points, would likely offer some of the most spectacular views, he said.

The plan was endorsed by the city's Plan Commission and Parks and Recreation Board. However, after officials got a graphic demonstration of the height of the structure and the views it afforded by being lifted in the fire department ladder truck, many aldermen expressed misgivings about its location, aesthetics and height.

The concerns led some officials to suggest an alternate site be sought.

"I am not adverse to this project," Ald. Dan Becker said Jan. 17. "I'm just not in favor of this location. I don't think it works, and I want to look elsewhere."

Neither Poole nor a representative of Jos. Schmitt & Sons Construction, which built a similar tower in Sheboygan in 2009, was available to attend the January meeting.

"I don't think it's fair to pursue this (discussion) until we have a representative of the people who want to do it here," Ald. Mike Ehrlich said at the time.

Representatives of the Friends group said they would notify the city when they can attend a council meeting, Grams said.

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“Until they come back to the city, there’s nothing we can do,” Mayor Scott Huebner said. “We’re just waiting to hear from them.”