

Lakefront parking plan unveiled

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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New design to link marina with downtown Port gets favorable review at meeting

A plan to reconfigure the parking lot behind the 100 block of Franklin Street was presented to a group of about two dozen downtown Port Washington business and property owners Monday and, unlike a previous concept, this proposal seemed to be accepted by virtually everyone.

The plan, created by the Main Street Design Committee, is intended to make the lot a safe, inviting area for pedestrians and motorists and to link the downtown with the city's lakefront.

Main Street Executive Director Sara Grover said that in a survey done several years ago, marina users said there was one big barrier between them and Franklin Street merchants.



“That barrier was this concrete parking lot,” she said. “We need to change that.”

Only two spaces would be lost with the plan, which would incorporate two-way traffic throughout the lot, create a sidewalk on the west side of the lot behind Duluth Trading Co. and Schooner Pub and add a raised crosswalk leading from the alley next to Schooner Pub to the harborwalk.

The parking lot plans would dovetail with plans to improve the alley next to Schooner, turning it into a pedestrian way, officials said.

It would also incorporate landscaping around the edges and on the interior to camouflage dumpsters and transformers. Much of the landscaping would be bushes that would not block

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views of the lake.

But Elizabeth O'Connell suggested that the city plant large shade trees, trimming the lower branches to retain lake views but creating a canopy that would shade the lot and create an inviting landscape.

"If you want to provide any sense of the lake and greenery, you have got to put something up higher," she said.

But Karen Poull, who with her husband Mark owns Schooner Pub, disagreed, saying it would block too many views. The lake view is what people want to see, she said.

The cul-de-sac on the east end of Main Street would be shortened, creating a sitting area with a feature — perhaps a fountain — in the center.

Architect Mike Ehrlich, a member of the Design Committee, said the group is continuing to look at ways to link the lot and lakefront with the Ozaukee Interurban Trail.

Electrical lines would be buried and the parking meters removed, likely replaced by a new kiosk system.

The plan will be reviewed by the city's Plan Commission when it meets Thursday, April 18, and later by the Common Council.

If approved, it will then be sent out for engineering work and bids, Main Street Executive Director Sara Grover said.

The plan needs to be approved quickly, Grover said, because We Energies expects to bury the utility lines before the peak summer tourist season.

The rest of the plan would be implemented in fall, she said.

Funding for the project would be handled by the city's tax incremental financing district.

Grover said the plan has already inspired some other downtown property owners to look at ways to clean up and improve their parking lots — most notably, the lot between Port Washington State Bank and the Port Harbor Center, where a survey is being done to determine ownership and a consideration made to burying the power lines.

Grover also updated the group on parking studies being conducted by the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission and Boston-based Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates.

The SEWRPC study is being done for the city, while Main Street and the city's Business Improvement District commissioned the Nelson/Nygaard study.

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Grover said the two agencies will work together to maximize the results of their studies, with work expected to begin by the end of April.

Nelson/Nygaard will hold a project kick-off meeting in late April, then meet with business and property owners to determine their needs, how they accommodate parking now and to hear of any future plans that might affect downtown parking.

The firm will also develop a survey to be filled out by downtown customers and visitors when they visit shops, Grover said. The survey will ask, among other things, whether people are aware of parking options.

At the same time, SEWRPC will collect parking data, such as traffic flow, and the number of cars in downtown lots on a daily basis. The agency will also look at how existing on and off-street parking is used.

Nelson/Nygaard will then analyze its data and that collected by SEWRPC and make recommendations to Main Street and the city. SEWRPC will review these and create an implementation plan, Grover said, noting this should be completed by late fall.

Image Information: A RENDERING SHOWS the changes that are proposed for the parking lot between the north slip marina and the 100 block of Franklin Street in Port Washington. The design is intended to be pedestrian and driver friendly while providing an enhanced view of the lakefront.