

Port aldermen want to make sure intergovernmental cooperation is a two-way street before OK'ing county plan

Port Washington aldermen on Tuesday tabled action sought by Ozaukee County that would have made West Main Street outside the Administration Center a one-way street.

Aldermen said they will take action on the measure when they are convinced the county will be receptive to a city proposal to make changes to the intersection of Lakeshore Road and the southern extension of Wisconsin Street next year.

City Administrator Mark Grams said initial discussions have led city officials to believe the county is not eager to embrace their proposal.

“You may want to use this (Main Street proposal) as a bargaining chip,” Grams said. “Have them give a little more consideration to the intersection we want to see there.”

Aldermen were quick to agree with his proposal.

“This is troubling after we made an effort to help them out,” Ald. Paul Neumyer said, noting the county is seeking the change to Main Street to increase parking near the Administration Center.

We’re willing to work with them on this street,” Ald. Mike Ehrlich said. “Why wouldn’t they be willing to work with us? I don’t think what we’re asking is unreasonable.”

The city’s bargaining chip is a county request to convert the 100 block of West Main Street into a one-way street heading east and place angle parking on both sides of the street.

This will alleviate parking shortages experienced by the county, especially during special programs, such as immunization clinics, some University of Wisconsin Extension programs and even the annual county budget hearing, county officials said.

The proposal, which was recommended by the city’s Traffic Safety Committee,

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Written by Kristyn Halbig Ziehm
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would add eight parking places to the 32 currently provided on Main Street between Wisconsin and Milwaukee streets, officials said.

The changes sought by the city involve recreating its southern gateway when Wisconsin Street is extended to the south through the We Energies property next year. The extended Wisconsin Street will largely follow the existing construction road on the utility land, intersecting Lakeshore Road near Sunset Road.

To accommodate this change, the city has proposed creating a right turn lane on Lakeshore Road that will help channel traffic onto the new Wisconsin Street. Traffic heading into Port on Division Street or turning onto Sunset Road would have to switch lanes to make those movements.

Slowing traffic on Lakeshore Road, also known as County Highway C, near Sunset Road is key to the proposal. The plan is intended to direct traffic heading to downtown and lakefront along the new Wisconsin Street instead of through a residential neighborhood, Public Works Director Rob Vanden Noven said.

“The biggest thing is slowing the traffic so they can see the directional sign and make the turn,” he said.

But to do those things, the county needs to change two of its ordinances — one to reduce the speed limit near the intersection of Lakeshore Road and the southern extension of Wisconsin Street from 40 mph to perhaps 25 mph, and the other to allow directional signs at the crossing, said Vanden Noven, who is slated to discuss the issue with the county Public Works Committee later this month.

Although no one has flat-out rejected the city’s proposal, Vanden Noven said, he’s been warned that county officials are typically reluctant to reduce the speeds on county highways and county ordinances prohibit directional signs.

The county does not seem to have an issue with the proposed layout of the intersection, Vanden Noven added.

Ald. Tom Hudson questioned why the county wouldn’t allow the signs, noting that less than a mile south of the new intersection, Ozaukee County has placed signs directing motorists to Lions Den Gorge.

“It sure seems inconsistent to me,” he said. “I don’t see any fundamental

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difference. Certainly the marina is a public use of the lakefront.”

Ald. Dan Becker, who is also a county supervisor, said the city and county should be willing to work together on the issue.

“I’ll personally look into it,” he said.

Vanden Noven said he believes the city and county can come to an agreement.

“I’m hopeful they’ll think one ordinance change deserves another,” he said. “I’m cautiously optimistic about our chances.

“I’m optimistic because I think it’s the right thing to do. I’m cautious because when we broached the subject last spring it was rejected, and when I requested it again in November, it took over one month to get a response.”

Because the city delayed action on the two ordinances needed to change parking on West Main Street, aldermen will have to begin the process of altering the city ordinances all over again, Grams said. A first review of the ordinance is expected to be conducted by the Common Council on Jan. 19.

But aldermen on Tuesday did take one step toward adding long-term parking near the Administration Center. They approved an ordinance that would remove the two-hour parking limit on Milwaukee Street north of the alley behind the Administration Center, allowing long-term parking in seven or eight spots there.