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City will trade public lot behind former Lueptow's for larger one across street

The parking picture in downtown Port Washington changed Tuesday as aldermen agreed to swap one of its downtown parking lots for the former M&I Bank drive-through and parking area across the street.

The swap means developer Daniel Ewig will have a parking lot behind the Boerner Mercantile Building — the former Lueptow's Furniture store — that he is renovating and the city will have a slightly larger public parking area across the street.

"It makes sense," City Administrator Mark Grams said.

No money will change hands as part of the swap, but both properties will be upgraded to create more attractive and user-friendly parking, officials said.

The city-owned lot between the Boerner Mercantile Building and Associated Bank has 44 parking stalls and is primarily used by downtown employees, Grams said.

The former drive-through currently has 44 parking places, but after the building is razed could be reconfigured to have 69 parking stalls, he added.

The city will be responsible for removing the former bank building, Grams said, adding that the structure has "some pretty good salvage value" that will help offset the cost.

The property exchange agreement approved by aldermen following a closed session Tuesday — the second one in recent weeks dealing with the land swap — calls for the city to raze the building by Dec. 21, 2014, and use the lot for parking for 10 years.

Ewig is also required to use the former city lot as a parking lot, according to the agreement.

Both lots will be improved as part of the deal, Grams said.

Architect Mike Ehrlich, an alderman who abstained from Tuesday's vote and did not participate in the closed session, will design the improvements to both lots, Grams said.

The designs are expected to be considered by the Plan Commission at its Dec. 20 meeting.

The exchange agreement calls for the city to remove two utility poles and bury the lines that

run across the lot Ewig is acquiring by Sept. 30, 2013.

It also calls for improvements to the alley that runs along the north side of the Boerner Building and connects Franklin Street to the parking lot.

According to the agreement, Ewig will install a concrete base in the alley and the city will have decorative pavers installed there by Sept. 30, 2013. Ewig will also be responsible for improvements to the alley, in effect turning it into a pedestrian walkway. These improvements will be outlined in a license agreement with the city, which will continue to own the alley.

To facilitate the land exchange, the Plan Commission declared the city-owned parking lot surplus property during a special session prior to the Common Council meeting.

The commission's declaration was subject to the land swap being approved by the council.

One major question is whether the public will still be able to use the alley off the parking lot to access "the (Post Office) mailbox we all use," commission member Bud Sova said.

Residents will still be able to access the mailbox, said Randy Tetzlaff, the city's director of planning and development.

Image Information: A LAND SWAP approved by the Port Washington Common Council Tuesday will make developer Daniel Ewig the owner of the city-owned parking lot behind the Boerner Mercantile Building (foreground) and the city the owner of the former M&I Bank drive-through property across the street (background). Photo by Sam Arendt