

Council paves way for sale of city properties

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Light Station to be transferred to Historical Society, Grant Street land used for soccer may be sold for homes

Three city-owned properties, including the historic Light Station, were designated as surplus by the Port Washington Common Council earlier this month — a declaration that paves the way for the city to sell them.

Two lots along Grant Street are proposed for residential developments — something a neighboring resident urged the council to be cautious of — while the city has said it intends to sell the Light Station to the Port Washington Historical Society, which has been operating it since the 1990s.

City Administrator Mark Grams said the city has been working with the Historical Society on that transfer.

“For all intents and purposes, the Historical Society maintains it,” Grams noted.

When the Coast Guard divested itself of the Light Station property, the city agreed to acquire the facility because the federal government wouldn’t transfer ownership to a nonprofit organization, he said.

Since then, the city has leased the property to the Historical Society, which raised hundreds of thousands of dollars and established partnerships to transform the former lighthouse into “a first class historic restoration that provides for a recreated interior of the living quarters and outbuildings,” Randy Tetzlaff, the city planner, said in a memo.

“After 20 years, the society has proven itself to be an excellent steward of the Light Station and it is now time for the city to divest its ownership,” he added.

Aldermen agreed, throwing their weight behind the idea of selling the property to the Historical Society.

Any such transfer will require approval from the National Park Service, Tetzlaff said.

Aldermen also agreed to declare two parcels on Grant Street surplus, noting eight lots could be carved from these properties — a move that drew concern from one neighboring property owner.

“That’s a lot of lots,” Kristopher Knous, 935 N. Grant St., told aldermen. “It could quickly change the dynamic of our neighborhood.”

He asked what type of development the city would consider there — single-family homes, duplexes or multifamily housing — and told officials that the lot on the east side of Grant Street is used by area soccer teams.

“It sounds like it’s thought of as completely unused fields,” Knous said. “It is actually used quite a bit.”

That land on the east side of Grant Street was platted for four lots in the 1970s, Tetzlaff said, but because of the shallow sanitary sewer depth, they were deemed unbuildable.

That led the developer to sell the property to the city in 1996.

However, he noted, someone notified the city last week that rubble had been buried on the property years ago.

The same situation may be in place on the properties west of Grant Street, which served as an unimproved access to the former city landfill, Tetzlaff said.

“I think we need to do some due diligence” to determine if rubble is on the site before the land

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is put up for sale, Tetzlaff said.

Ald. John Sigwart voted against declaring the lots on the west side of the street surplus, saying that removing the rubble could destroy the property.

“It’ll be completely denuded by the time you get the rubble out of there,” Sigwart said.

But Ald. Dave Larson said that the declaration of surplus lands doesn’t obligate the city to sell the properties.

The city should look into the rubble issue, then determine whether it’s appropriate to sell the land, Larson said.

“If we don’t, we don’t,” he said.

The west-side property could likely be subdivided into four lots as well, Tetzlaff noted.

Tetzlaff said it is estimated that the cost of extending utilities to the properties would be \$70,000.

Each lot on the east side of Grant Street could likely sell for \$65,000 to \$75,000, he noted, while those on the west side could be valued at \$80,000 or more each.