

NORWALK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Parking problems



Erik Trautmann / Hearst Connecticut Media

Library patron Saghar Lavine with her daughter, Mitra Lavine, 2, complains about the lack of parking at the Norwalk Public Library main branch on Belden Avenue on Tuesday.

Appeal of apartment complex pending, spots remain in short supply

A4 | The Hour | Wednesday, February 1, 2017

FROM THE FRONT PAGE



Erik Trautmann / Hearst Connecticut Media

The unused parking lot next to the Norwalk Public Library Main Branch on Mott Avenue on Tuesday in Norwalk. There is an ongoing appeal of the Norwalk Zoning Commissions 2016 approval of a 60-unit apartment complex for the lot that had been available for library visitors.

By Robert Koch

NORWALK — After visiting the Main Library on Belden Avenue, Saghar Lavine walked past the large chained-off parking lot next to the library's small parking lot and grimaced.

"There's never any parking. I've complained about it over and over and look at this lot: Completely empty," said Lavine, who came with 2-year-old daughter, while pointing at the lot nearby. "And the people

come with little children, little baby carriages and strollers and they have to park all the way down there or some lot."

Officials are exploring ways to relieve the parking pressure.

Steve Rudolph, a trustee of the Fraternal Order of Eagles Aerie No. 588, confirmed Tuesday discussions have taken place regarding allowing library patrons to use spaces in the order's parking lot at 10 Mott Ave. near the library.

"We actually have been in contact with

Alex Knopp, and he and attorneys are working with our attorneys, working out a lease agreement for the parking," Rudolph said. "I don't know that I'm free to discuss the specifics, but they're looking for a certain number of spaces."

Rudolph expressed hope an arrangement can be reached that works for both parties.

"We're in a business of our own and, of course, we want to help out the library as

See Parking on A4



PARKING

From page A1

we can," Rudolph said. "But it's property we own and pay taxes on so we need to do it in a way that's satisfactory to both sides."

Knopp, a former Norwalk mayor, president of the Norwalk Public Library System Board of Trustees and chairman of the Norwalk Public Library Foundation, Inc., declined to comment about the Eagles' parking lot but did speak about the parking pressures around the Main Library at 1 Belden Ave.

"Norwalk taxpayers are supporting the library operations, but are unable to use the facilities because there is no parking, so I don't want to leave any stone unturned when it comes to providing sufficient parking so the public gets the full benefit of the library," Knopp said.

The library foundation, a nonprofit organization that supports the library through donations and volunteerism, last year appealed the Norwalk Zoning Commission's approval of an apartment development for the chained-off lot at 11 Belden Ave. Knopp plans to be in state Superior Court in Stamford when the appeal is heard in March.

"It's clear to me that if the development moves forward as approved it would be impossible for the library to reserve property, either for sufficient parking or for an expansion of the library itself," Knopp said. "Right now, there are roughly 25 spaces to serve hundreds of visitors each day. Since becoming president of the (library) board last July 1, I've

heard dozens and dozens of complaints that people of Norwalk, who pay to maintain the library through their taxes, avoid using it because they are afraid they won't be able to park."

Last May, the library foundation appealed in state Superior Court in Stamford the Zoning Commission's approval of a five-story, 69-unit apartment building for the chained-off parking lot at 11 Belden Ave. The owner of the parking lot, 587 CT AVE LLC is named as a defendant in the appeal.

"The library has limited parking on its site and there is very limited on-street

parking near the library on which the Plaintiff is dependent for its programs for the public, as the Subject Property has insufficient parking and is dependent on leased off-site parking which the record reflects is of limited duration," wrote Gregory J. Cava, the attorney who filed the appeal on behalf of the library foundation.

The Norwalk Zoning Commission approved plans for The Lofts @ Mott Avenue in April 2016 on a 5-1 vote with one abstention. The plan calls for 51 on-site parking spaces and 39 off-site spaces across the street at 3 Mott Ave. and 5 Mott Ave.

The leased spaces would be available weekdays, from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 a.m., and weekends.

As a result, Lofts and Mott Avenue residents will have to park elsewhere when the leased parking is unavailable "and there is more than a reasonable likelihood they will use the parking spaces on the library property, the library's reserved spaces on the Subject Property, and adjacent on-street parking spaces rendering Plaintiff's programming use untenable," Cava wrote.

Peter M. Nolin, the attorney representing 587 CT Ave. LLC, agrees that park-

licensed architect and a licensed engineer, and the plans were reviewed by the Zoning Department for compliance with the zoning regulations," McCann said. "They all reported to the Zoning Commission that the plan was in compliance with the zoning regulations and the Zoning Commission had no reason to doubt that."

McCann found it "peculiar" that the foundation seven months later submitted a report concluding otherwise.

"This is the first time that we're seeing an engineer's report contradicting the confirmation of compliance with the zoning regulations," McCann said.

The original apartment plan came up short during its first pass before the Norwalk Zoning Commission. In March, the commission rejected it on 2-2 vote with one abstention.

Library officials have opposed the apartment plan from the start.

"For our library, we need parking, we need expansion and we really need to use that land for something else besides apartments," said Library System Director Chris Bradley before noting the number of parking spaces in library's parking lot. "It's tough living with 14 spaces."

Some relief came in September 2015, when the First Taxing District and library officials announced the availability of parking spaces at the district-owned property at 3 Belden Ave. The 11 spaces nearest People's Bank were made available to library patrons at all hours and the remaining 22 spaces after 5 p.m. and weekends.

rkoch@bearstmediact.com