

## NORWALK PUBLIC LIBRARY

# Residents urge support for expansion

By Robert Koch

NORWALK — Speaker after speaker urged two Norwalk Common Council subcommittees Tuesday evening to support an agreement that would secure additional parking and potential expansion room for the century-old Main Library on Belden Avenue.

“Once the land is gone, the ability to expand the library will be lost,” said Barbara Kinn. “The cost of building a new library in the future at another location — even if land is available — would be even more costly.”

Kinn was among more than a dozen people to share their

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## LIBRARY

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thoughts with the council's Finance/Claims and Land Use committees during the joint public hearing at City Hall. About three-dozen people attended the hearing in the council chambers.

“I, for one, have heard a pretty strong message,” Councilman Thomas Livingston, the Land Use Committee chairman, said afterward.

Under the agreement, the city would pay 587 CT AVE \$460,000 by the end of August and have six years to decide whether to buy the 1.25-acre property at 11 Belden Ave. for \$4.885 million. Approval of the agreement would immediately secure the city use of the private parking lot fronting Mott Avenue from the property.

Former Mayor Alex Knopp, library board chairman, helped negotiate the agreement. He thanked the committees for expediting their review of the proposal and said every Norwalk family with a child entering Kindergarten this fall will receive an application for a library card.

“We want every school child in Norwalk to have a library card,” Knopp said. “The question before you tonight is whether the library will have the capacity to serve these hundreds of new patrons as well as the 33,000 current Norwalk residents who already have their library card.”

He asked the elected officials to support the agreement as their predecessors had backed plans to acquire land to build Oak



Erik Trautmann / Hearst Connecticut Media

The parking lot serving 11 Belden Ave. exclusively is adjacent to the Norwalk Public library main branch.

Hills Park, Calf Pasture Beach, Taylor Farm, Gal-laher Park and to modernize the city's schools.

“We need to do something big and having a modern library with sufficient onsite parking is a big goal for the city,” he said.

Ralph Bloom, library trustee and volunteer, said the agreement offers the city “an opportunity to correct a problem that’s been going on for decades” and have “a fine 21st century library.”

Library Director Chris Bradley said visits to the Main and SoNo Branch libraries grew to 666,530 last year — up 70 percent since 2014. She read a letter from former library Director Les Kozerowitz supporting the proposed agreement.

With the signing of the agreement in state Superior Court in Stamford last month, the Norwalk Public Library Foundation agreed to withdraw its appeal of the Norwalk Zoning Commission's approval of a 69-apartment development

for the private lot.

Upon receipt of the \$460,000, 587 CT AVE Principal Jason Milligan would withdraw and void the apartment plan and agree not to submit another development project for the lot without the permission of the city for six years.

Last week, the Norwalk Parking Authority and the city's Planning Commission lent their unanimous support to the agreement. Knopp hopes to see the it receive similar support from the Board of Estimate and Taxation on July 10 and the council on July 11.

The Parking Authority, in its action, pre-emptively accepted the privately owned lot at 11 Belden Ave. into its inventory. Under the that action, the 28-space lot owned by 587 CT AVE, LLC would be combined with the library's 14-space lot.

The agreement comes as the library board looks to modernize and expand the library at 1 Belden Ave. The historic Carnegie library was last expanded in 1982.