

MAIN LIBRARY

Parking deal could cost \$5M

City, developer finalize agreement to acquire adjacent lot

By Robert Koch

NORWALK — Securing additional parking and potential expansion room for the Main Library on Belden Avenue could come with a hefty price tag.

An appraisal, performed as part of talks between the city and the owner of 11 Belden

Ave., valued the property at \$4.6 million. The purchase price could be \$4.8 million, according to multiple sources with knowledge of the agreement.

More will be known Friday afternoon when Mayor Harry Rilling, Norwalk Public Library Board of Trustees President Alex Knopp and Jason Milligan announce the negotiated agree-

ment and new parking arrangements. Milligan is a principal with 587 CT Ave. LLC, the owner of the property.

The news conference is scheduled for 3:15 p.m. at the library at 1 Belden Ave. As of Thursday afternoon, Common Council members were being brought up to speed on the proposed agreement.

"Right now, we're consulting with the council and letting them know the details,"

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Erik Trautmann / Hearst Connecticut Media

The parking lot that serves 11 Belden Ave. is adjacent to the Norwalk Public Library's Main Branch.

PARKING

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Rilling said. "We want them to feel comfortable with things first and see if there are any questions, so I really don't want to disclose the details of the agreement right now."

The agreement appears final-

ized based upon an action in state Superior Court in Stamford. On Wednesday, Norwalk Public Library Foundation Inc., a nonprofit organization that supports the library through donations and volunteerism, withdrew its appeal of the Zoning Commission's approval of 69 apartments for the parking lot at 11 Belden Ave.

Knopp, a former Norwalk may-

or and president of the foundation, released a statement Wednesday evening announcing a news conference Thursday afternoon at which he, Rilling and Milligan would be "removing the chain currently blocking access for library patrons to the parking lot on Mott Avenue as part of the implementation of the new parking arrangements created by the new agreement."

The press conference was later rescheduled to Friday due to a scheduling conflict.

Property value grows

To date, the council has had at least one closed-door discussion on the proposed purchase agreement between the city, library board and 587 CT Ave. LLC, which bought the property at 11 Belden Ave. in February 2015 for \$2.65 million, according to the Tax Assessor's Office.

The assessor's office had the 1.25-acre property, which is home to the bank to People's United Bank and several other businesses, valued at \$2.14 million and assessed at \$1.5 million on the city's grand list of Oct. 1, 2013. Now assessed as a commercial property, its classification would

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change to apartments and its value likely increase if the approved housing were built.

Council members on Thursday reminded that whatever agreement is announced will require their approval and that won't come without the public first being made aware.

"Nothing is going to go through without the public knowing what's going on and getting votes and going through the proper committees," said Councilman Richard J. Bonenfant, an at-large Republican.

Council Majority Leader John Kydes, a District C Democrat, offered a similar assessment of where things stand regarding the parking lot.

"It's my understanding that the

library recently withdrew their lawsuit against the abutting property owner," Kydes said. "The owner of this property has proposed selling it to the city to alleviate the library's parking issues. This proposal will now go through the normal process of being vetted by the council."

Not all about parking

Laoise King, chief of staff for the mayor, said the need for additional space isn't limited to parking.

"It's not only that. It's the ability to preserve that land for library expansion," King said. "So short term, there's a parking issue. Long term, we know that they want to expand the library and develop it and if there's another development, we won't be able to."

The Main Library, which was built in the early 20th century with money donated by businessman and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, has about 25 parking spaces and several hundred visitors daily.

The effort to secure more space comes as the library moves forward with a master plan for the historic structure.

Press conference rescheduled for Friday, June 2, 2107 at 3:15 pm.