Bids being accepted for parking lot development

By Eric Crump
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At the May 24 Homewood Village Board meeting, trustees authorized staff to invite alternate bids and proposals for the sale and development of the village hall parking lot at 2024 Chestnut Road.

The call for bids is a required step before the village can enter into an agreement with a developer.

HCF Homewood has expressed interest in the site with the intention of building a five-story, 59-unit residential building there.

The firm is building the Hartford Building at Ridge Road and Martin Avenue in downtown Homewood, which will include three floors of apartments over a first-floor restaurant and parking garage.

Mayor Richard Hofeld said a new development on the parking lot site, if it becomes a reality, will contribute to the village's efforts to promote population density and business opportunity in the downtown area.

He cited a housing market survey, commissioned by the village in 2016, that concluded there was unmet demand in downtown Homewood for between 175 and 225 additional residential units.

Homewood resident Dianne Noe questioned whether the village could afford to lose parking spots to a new development. She reported a recent visit to a downtown restaurant in the evening and parking spots along Ridge Road and Martin Avenue were all taken.

Hofeld said the village's acquisition earlier this year of the commuter parking lot on Harwood Avenue would balance out the loss of spaces at village hall.

The commuter parking lot was previously owned by the Chicago South Suburbs Mass Transit District, which was dissolved by the state legislature last year. Now that the village owns the lot, it can be used for public parking during evenings and weekends.

Noe said many women might not feel safe using the lot in the evenings.

She brought several other concerns to the attention of the board, starting with the condition of the Dixie Highway viaduct. Hofeld said the viaduct is under the jurisdiction of the Illinois Department of Transportation.

"I've never seen it look as bad as it does now," Noe said. "How bad is it going to get before they do something?"

Hofeld said the village has been asking IDOT to make improvements to the viaduct for years -- especially repairs to the drainage system to alleviate repeated flooding. He said promises from state officials to address problems have so far been unfulfilled.

Noe also questioned the plan to locate a new water tower at 17900 Dixie Highway, property the village is in the process of purchasing. Currently, the site is home to an office building that was originally used as Homewood's public library.

The site is adjacent to the viaduct, and Noe said it would be the first thing people see as they drive into downtown Homewood from the north.

"That's your opening to Homewood," she said. "Can't we find a better place?"

Hofeld explained that the new tower, which is expected to be completed in about three years, will be beautified and landscaped.

He also noted that there is a limited area in which the new tower can be built in order to maintain the right balance in the water system, a point Public Works Director John Schaefer made at a previous board meeting. And there were few spots within that area available for purchase.

The board also approved other items on the consent agenda, including:

• A measure to allow the Homewood Science Center to sublease a portion of its space to Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana. Trustee Jay Heiferman, who also serves on the science center board, said the Girl Scouts would use space the science center doesn't require for its programming.

• A class 4A liquor license to Culture at 18031 Dixie Highway. The restaurant and entertainment establishment has been closed for several months to build out a kitchen. It expects to reopen soon.

A parking variance for a barbershop at 18159 Dixie Highway was deferred until a future meeting at Hofeld's request. He cited the absence of two trustees, Cece Belue and Karen Washington, as the reason for the delay.