

NORWALK LIBRARY

Common Council approves parking plan

Allocates \$460,000 to get the ball rolling

By Robert Koch

NORWALK — The Common Council cleared the way Tuesday evening to provide parking relief at the Norwalk Main Library on Belden Avenue and expand the library in the future.

By unanimous votes, the council approved an option-to-purchase agreement for the adjacent property at 11 Belden Ave. and allocated \$460,000 to get the ball rolling.

“This is a home run for Norwalk, because this library is poised to be the anchor for the Wall Street area.”

Mayor Harry Rilling

to have a vibrant library with an active downtown social life in the Wall Street area, I think it's going to be really, really good, really, really exciting.”

Chandler was among nearly a dozen residents to urge the council to approve the agreement and \$460,000 special capital appropriation.

Upon payment of the \$460,000 to the owner of 11 Belden Ave., the city will gain exclusive

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Cheers sounded afterward in the council chambers.

“For the library, it gives them an opportunity to serve more people on a regular basis,” resident Eric Chandler said afterward. “It gives them the opportunity to expand and ... now that we have the (Wall Street) Theater happening just a half a block away, being able



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The parking lot that serves 11 Belden Ave. exclusively which is also adjacent to the Norwalk Public library main branch.

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use of the 28-space parking lot and have six years to decide whether to buy the larger parcel for up to \$5.8 million.

Mayor Harry Rilling thanked former Mayor Alex Knopp for negotiating the agreement — “he was instrumental” — as well as the city’s law department and council leaders for helping come up with the deal.

“This is a home run for Norwalk, because this library is poised to be the anchor for the Wall Street area,” Rilling said.

Jason Milligan, principal with 587 CT AVE LLC, the owner of 11 Belden Ave., purchased the property in 2015 for \$2.65 million and last year received city approval to build 69 apartments in the parking lot portion. In hopes of the council approving the agreement, the Norwalk Public Library Foundation withdrew its court appeal of the apartment plan approval.

Several council members acknowledged the potential cost of the agreement in the long run, but indicated the matter goes beyond money.

“There’s no secret that we’re paying a premium for this property,” said Council Major-

ity Leader John Kydes, a District C Democrat. “But I think in the end game it will prove to be the right decision.”

Councilman Richard J. Bonenfant, an at-large Republican who earlier voted against the agreement over the potential cost, gave his support.

“I think we are paying too much but ... 10 years down the road people will say, ‘You did the right thing,’” Bonenfant said.

The council approved the appropriation after giving the city’s law department authority to write into it additional protections.

“We would include some additional provisions that would typically be included in a standard option agreement,” said Corporation Counsel Mario F. Coppola.

Knopp, now library board president, thanked Rilling and others for supporting the negotiations that led to the agreement. He held a chain that barred entrance to the parking lot — “the issue before you tonight is whether this chain will go back up” — before adding the matter goes beyond parking.

“The library is a key institution in Norwalk, one with the school system,” Knopp said. “We hope that you will invest tonight a rather modest amount of funds to preserve our opportunities to improve not just the library but the whole neighborhood around the library.”