

City mulling options for downtown park project

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By January Rutherford

SEYMOUR, Ind. – City officials are looking at three different design options for construction of a new park in downtown Seymour.

Which one the Seymour Redevelopment Commission chooses will depend on how much money the board wants to invest.

Greg Martz with GM Development Companies made a presentation last week to the commission updating members on progress the company has made in the last month to secure the property and finance the project.

“We started the due diligence process on this site and have done a lot of research with existing surveys that have been done over the past four or five years,” Martz said. “We found no obstacles ... for this project.”

The three design options represent “good, better and best” and have different budgets, Martz said.

“But keep in mind any option is on the table,” he said. “It could very easily become a blend of these three options.”

The “best” design is estimated to cost \$3.41 million, which includes land acquisition, construction and soft costs, and is the closest to what HWC Engineering first proposed for the park in 2012 before the project stalled.

Public surveys went out and were completed by hundreds of residents to help guide the design and choose features to be included, such as a pavilion, restrooms, a circular turnaround for vehicle traffic, a walking trail and screening and fencing to keep people from walking on the railroad tracks.

Option B’s estimated budget is \$2.9 million, and Option C is \$2.3 million.

“We found some value engineering ideas for the other two concepts to lower the costs,” Martz said.

Cory Daly with Indianapolis-based HWC Engineering served as project manager for the park project and continues to be involved. He walked the commission through the three designs.

Although Option C is the least expensive of the three, it lacks some of the key features Seymour Mayor Craig Luedeman has said he wants to see, most notably the pavilion and restrooms. It also doesn’t include as much landscaping as the other two designs, and signage would be reduced or eliminated. A circular turnaround drive also would not be included in Option B or C.

“One of the original intents of this project was to make this a really nice, inviting gateway and focal point for the city,” Daly said. “With this option, you would have a very nice, bare-bones site from which you can build from down the road.”

It would still be an open green space people could enjoy, he added, with the capability of serving as a new location for the Seymour Area Farmers Market and overflow for Seymour Oktoberfest and other downtown events.

Option B would include a pavilion structure and restrooms to host concerts that also could be rented for weddings and other outdoor events.

The design of the pavilion, though, would have to change significantly from Option A to meet budget requirements, Daly said.

Commissioner Mark Dennis voiced his concerns that there wouldn't be enough parking, especially for events. Daly said there would be around 60 parking spaces added in the new park.

Commissioner John Reinhart suggested a pedestrian crosswalk be built to connect the B&O Parking Lot on the north side of the CSX rail line to the new park, providing more free public parking.

Daly said it's unlikely CSX would allow a crossing to be installed on their right of way; however, the walking trail does extend to the crossing on Broadway Street to the east.

The project is a unique public/private partnership where Indianapolis-based GM Development Companies is working to purchase the vacant rail lot downtown where the CSX and Louisville and Indiana rail lines meet and develop the park. The city has been unable to purchase the property on its own from owner Dick Elmore of Seymour.

“We were just recently able to get the site under contract,” Martz said.

Once the park is completed, the city would then buy it from GM Development Companies using tax increment financing revenue. That source of funding is generated by the city capturing a portion of property taxes from new development within the TIF district for a designated amount of time. The money is controlled by the redevelopment commission.

Local tax revenue from residential property taxes will not be used to fund the park, meaning the project won't increase the city's tax rate.

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