

Community News

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Section B

City, town ink land deal for data centers

By KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
Ozaukee Press staff

Port Washington city officials on Tuesday took steps to pave the way for a sprawling data center complex, reaching an accord with town officials that will allow the city to annex approximately 2,000 acres for the massive campus that would cost billions of dollars to develop and require a gigawatt or more of power to run, even as residents continue to object to the project.

The agreement, which was inked by both the Common Council and Town Board Tuesday, provides a variety of benefits for the town, including the extension of sewer

■ Officials OK agreement that paves way for annexation of 2,000 acres in face of opposition to massive complex

and water services throughout Knellsville at no cost to the township and five years of increased tax revenues, in return for amending the border agreement as it pertains to the affected property and allowing the land to be annexed as of Feb. 1.

The terms were hammered out by town officials in a closed session Tuesday afternoon and presented to the city in a closed session Tuesday night, with both panels approving the agreement in open sessions

before standing-room-only crowds.

Town Supr. Greg Welton abstained from the vote since he owns land in Knellsville and may benefit from the terms of the agreement.

Residents warned officials to take their time approving the massive data center, which they say will irrevocably change the character of the community.

"Consider the human impact on people who are not your citizens but are citizens of the town," Kim Tydrick, 4465 Weilers

Way in the Town of Port, told the Common Council, noting town residents are "living the lifestyle we chose in that area. You're ripping that away from us."

"I don't want this in my backyard and I don't think any of you would want this in your backyard. I think it takes such hubris to make a decision like this without listening to the people impacted."

"This legacy you're creating I don't think is going to be what you think it's going to be."

Tydrick said the data center will diminish property values and bring noise and light. **See Data centers on page 2B**



A RENDERING BY Bray Architects shows the fire station portion of the proposed public safety building at the corner of highways LL and 33. The fire station would face Highway LL while the police station would face Highway 33.

Port moving quickly on safety building

■ City poised to acquire land from county, seek bids for construction of \$33.5 million police, fire station building that is to begin later this year

By KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
Ozaukee Press staff

The City of Port Washington's plans for a \$33.5 million public safety center are proceeding quickly, with the city preparing to purchase the almost seven-acre parcel at the corner of highways LL and 33 for the center from Ozaukee County.

On Tuesday, the Common Council agreed to exercise its option to buy the land for \$275,000, a transaction that could take place in the next 30 days, City Attorney Matt Nugent said.

"In order to get this project moving, this is a step that has to occur," Nugent said.

Aldermen also voted to eliminate a conditional use permit and land covenant it has held on the property since 2018, when plans called for a Casey's gas station and convenience store to be built there — plans that later fell through.

Public Works Director Rob Vanden Noven said the city is waiting for an agreement with the Department of Transportation to allow access to the site from both highways LL and 33.

The DOT recently informed the city it



THE CITY OF Port Washington is expected to buy roughly seven acres of vacant land owned by Ozaukee County at the intersection of highways LL (to the right) and 33 (to the left) for a public safety building. *Photo by Bill Schanen IV*

had received an appraisal determining the value of the access, he said earlier this year, noting that when Casey's planned to build on the site, the access rights were expected to cost about \$175,000.

Planning for the public safety building is taking shape, and the project should go out for bids in the coming weeks, Maura Riordan of MC Group, the city's personal

representative, said.

The city still needs to approve a contract with construction manager CD Smith, something that had been expected to be done by now but has been delayed for a couple weeks, Riordan said.

Once the contact is approved, she said, the project will go out to bid. **See Safety building on page 9B**

District to hit the ground running if voters OK \$59.4M plan

■ PW-S school system plans to have owner's rep, contractor standing by if referendum approved

By BILL SCHANEN IV
Ozaukee Press staff

If voters approve a \$59.4 million referendum in April, the Port Washington-Saukville School District will be able to get to work immediately designing a new Saukville Elementary School on a new site and major maintenance projects at each of its other schools.

The School Board's Finance and Human Resources Committee last week endorsed a plan to hire both an owner's representative and general contractor to oversee and perform the work, which in the case of a new school is scheduled to span more than a year. The full board is expected to consider the plan when it meets on Monday, Jan. 27.

The owner's representative — a firm that would represent the district's interests from design through completion of the projects with the goal of ensuring work is completed on time and on budget — could be hired as early as next month, Director of Business Services and Human Resources Mel Nettesheim told the committee.

The owner's representative will only begin billing the district if and when the referendum is approved and, along with Bray Architects, which will design the new school and improvements at the district's other buildings, will consult the district on the hiring of a general contractor.

"They (the owner's representative) will start right away," Nettesheim said. "It gets **See Referendum on page 11B**

Barbara Donald



A celebration of life will be held in honor of Barbara Donald at 3:30 p.m. Friday, Jan. 24, 2024, at Crossroads Presbyterian Church, 6031 W. Chapel Hill Rd., Mequon, WI 53097 (www.crossroadspres.org). The family will greet guests in a time of visitation in the Crossroads Fireside Lounge (upstairs, above the sanctuary) from 2:30 p.m. until the service.

Barbara will be interred with her husband at Crossroads Presbyterian Memory Garden following the service.

In lieu of flowers, please feel free to donate to the Susan B. Richardson Hospice, <https://ssrhospicehome.org>, in Sheboygan Falls, Wis. These people were a wonderful gift while navigating the end of life process.

Karl Hokanson

Karl Hokanson of Port Washington passed away on Friday, Jan. 17, 2025. He was 82 years old.

For a complete obituary, see next week's Ozaukee Press or visit www.earnisefuneral-home.com.

Earnisse Funeral Home in Port Washington is proudly serving the Hokanson family.

Referendum: District closing in on site

FROM PAGE 1B

us ahead of the game so they can start working with Bray right away."

The hiring of an owner's representative to manage large projects has become common practice, Nettesheim said, and the one the district hires will be particularly useful in tracking expenses, overseeing the general contractor and subcontractors and sorting through what are sure to be numerous change orders.

"We want to make sure our contractor and subcontractors aren't overbilling us," Nettesheim said. "It's really a way to make sure we're being good stewards of taxpayer money."

When asked how much an owner's representative will cost the district, Nettesheim said, "I would anticipate no more than \$10,000, and I think that would be extreme."

Money for an owner's representative is included in the referendum, she said.

The district also plans to have a site for a new Saukville Elementary School before the April election. The School Board met in closed session earlier this month to develop a negotiating strategy for the land purchase.

The district is considering three sites, all of which are in the Town of Saukville and would have to be annexed into the Village of Saukville, Supt. Michael McMahon said.

All three sites are between 10 and 15 acres, a size Bray has identified as optimal for an elementary school, he said.

The district, McMahon said, wants voters to know where the school would be built prior to the April election.

"Hopefully we'll have an accepted offer to purchase pending approval of our referendum," McMahon said.

Although the district is in a position to begin design work in April if the referendum is approved, maintenance project work and construction of the new school is not scheduled to begin until spring 2026.

The maintenance work would be com-

pleted by fall of that year while the school is slated to be completed in summer 2027, according to a preliminary design and construction schedule drafted by Bray.

"Bray has given us a very conservative schedule," McMahon said. "The work we're doing now could expedite the process."

The construction of a new Saukville Elementary School on a new site is estimated to cost \$45.8 million, which includes the cost of the land, and is considered the most important part of what will be the district's first referendum since 2015, when voters approved borrowing \$49.4 million for the renovation of Port Washington High School and an addition to Dunwiddie Elementary School.

The nearly 70-year-old Saukville Elementary School, which last underwent a major renovation in 1989, is in need of significant maintenance, and expanding it to accommodate what administrators believe will be an increasing number of students is impractical because it sits in a floodplain and is flanked by wetlands, according to Bray Architects.

Beyond its size and location, Saukville Elementary School faces a host of challenges that range from its aging systems to its design.

"We cannot sustain that building any longer with the equipment that is there," Nettesheim said last month.

School officials also seem to be increasingly concerned that the so-called open-concept school, which does not have traditional classrooms, although dividers have been used as makeshift walls over the years, is contributing to the challenges there. Saukville Elementary School's state report card scores are considerably lower than those of its counterparts in the district and significantly more students open enroll out of the school than they do from either Dunwiddie or Lincoln elementary schools.

"I've heard from so many parents that they would never send their kids there because of the open concept," Stephanie Trigsted, who represents the Village of

Saukville on the board, said.

The district initially proposed a \$66.7 million referendum but pared the cost to \$59.4 million in an effort to shore up support for the new school and the most critical maintenance work in light of an October survey of district residents that projected a narrow approval margin that was within the margin of error as well as concerns about significant City of Port Washington tax increases.

"We wanted to listen to community members who spoke to some of the challenges of tax increases outside the School District," McMahon said.

In addition to the new school, the district had planned to spend \$20.9 million on major maintenance projects at its other schools to address aging heating and cooling systems, Americans with Disabilities Act compliance and security as well as window and roof replacement, new playgrounds and emergency generators.

But the referendum question approved by the board last month reflects a \$7.3 million cut to maintenance spending at Thomas Jefferson Middle School, a move that officials said makes sense because the school is slated for major renovations or replacement in the relatively near future. The only work that would be done at the middle school under the new plan is the replacement of its roof, which has been blamed for recent flooding.

Approval of the referendum will allow the district to catch up on deferred maintenance, and school officials have pledged to create a fully funded, 10-year maintenance plan to wean the district from its reliance on referendums to care for its facilities.

"We would be starting with a clean slate so we don't have to come back (to voters) for maintenance," School Board President Sara McCutcheon said last month.

Borrowing \$59.4 million is estimated to increase the school property tax rate by 26 cents per \$1,000 of equalized value, an amount that would cost the owner of a \$300,000 home an additional \$78 in taxes annually.

View obituaries from past issues at ozaukeepress.com

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