

ANOTHER LIBRARY LOT

Volumes of parking



Erik Trautmann / Hearst Connecticut Media

Former Norwalk mayor Alex Knopp, left, joins current Mayor Harry Rilling, center, and developer Jason Milligan on Friday to announce an agreement to give Norwalk Public Library patrons more parking in the lot adjacent to the library.

Deal means 40 more much-needed spaces

By Robert Koch

NORWALK — Pending city approvals, finding a parking space at the Norwalk Public Library on Belden Avenue will soon become a lot easier.

On Friday afternoon, officials an-

nounced an agreement between the city, Norwalk Public Library Foundation, and 587 CT AVE LLC which would provide the library 50 to 54 parking spaces where there are now only 14. The deal lays the groundwork for future expansion.

The additional spaces are located in the privately owned parking lot west of the library.

With help from lot owner Jason Milli-

gan, Mayor Harry Rilling unlocked the padlock and removed the chain at the front of the lot along Mott Avenue as library board Chairman Alex Knopp looked on.

"Ending the nightmare of chronically insufficient parking at the Norwalk Library is now at hand," said Knopp, the former mayor who helped broker the agreement. "We have concluded an

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From left, developer Jason Milligan, former Norwalk Mayor Alex Knopp, and current Mayor Harry Rilling announce more parking for Norwalk Public Library patrons.

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agreement to present to the Common Council that preserves the library's opportunity to both expand on-site parking and to modernize its now-outdated facility

so that it can serve as a vibrant community center for Norwalk and as an anchor for revitalizing the entire neighborhood surrounding the library."

Rilling credited Knopp and Corporation Counsel Mario F. Coppola for negotiating the agreement,

which he said will benefit the library and its patrons.

"We are closing in on additional parking for the library with options at some point perhaps for additional expansion of the library," Rilling said.

Although the chain was removed Friday, the city's

law department has yet to resolve liability issues. Milligan, principal with 587 CT AVE, however, said he does not plan to put the chain back up.

Under the agreement, the city would pay 587 CT AVE \$460,000 by the end of August and have six years to decide whether to purchase some or all of the 1.25-acre property, which is also home to People's United Bank and other businesses. The final purchase price would be \$4.88 million.

The agreement gives the city the option to buy the property at 11 Belden Ave., but does not require it. The city may renegotiate with the owner for part of the property or at a different price, Knopp said.

"I hope the city does not ever pay the full amount to exercise the option to purchase and instead finds creative ways to leverage its contract rights and redevelopment authority,"

Knopp said.

With the signing of the agreement in state Superior Court in Stamford on Wednesday, the library foundation has agreed to withdraw its appeal of the Norwalk Zoning Commission's approval of the 69-apartment development known as The Lofts @ Mott Ave. Upon receipt of the \$460,000, Milligan will withdraw and void the plan and agree not to submit another development project for the lot without the permission of the city for six years.

"The option is what I like to look at as an insurance policy," Milligan said. "If after six years, we're unable to come to terms with something greater here, then the city has the insurance policy that they can take over and do something else. So stay tuned, I'm sure the brightest minds will be involved in expanding the library and we've got lots of ideas to share, as well."

Knopp hopes to see the

city's Planning Commission, Board of Estimate and Taxation, and Common Council approve the agreement in July. If that happens, the Norwalk Parking Authority will reconfigure the lot by merging it with the library's lot by removing the fence and berm. The authority would manage the expanded lot with library patrons parking at no-charge, according to Chairman Richard Brescia.

About two dozen people, including council leaders, parking authority representatives and Norwalk Public Library Executive Director Chris Bradley, attended the symbolic opening of the private lot. Bradley labeled it a "red-letter day for the library."

"This is really a red-letter day for Norwalk Library," Bradley said. "It's not just the parking that we need immediately, but it's the idea that we're going to expand our library and modernize it."