

NORWALK LIBRARY

More parking by year's end

By Robert Koch

NORWALK — Signs will go up shortly in the private parking lot next to the Norwalk Main Library as plans are completed to combine it with the library lot.

“We will be putting up signs in the lot that say ‘temporary parking —

library patrons only’ for now,” said Kathryn Hebert, the city’s administration services manager and staff person to the Norwalk Parking Authority. “We will present a draft construction schedule to the Parking Authority at the end of July.”

Hebert said the signs

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were ordered Wednesday for the private parking lot owned by 587 CT AVE, LLC. She hopes to see the lot revamped and merged with the library’s lot by the end of this year.

On Tuesday evening, the Norwalk Common Council approved an option-to-purchase agreement for the private property at 11 Belden Ave. and \$460,000 to fund it upfront. Under the approval, the city gains exclusive use of the 28-space parking lot and has six years to decide whether to purchase the larger parcel for a fixed price of \$4.8 million.

Alex Knopp, former Norwalk mayor and current library board chairman, negotiated the agreement. He explained its elements and purpose to the council Tuesday evening.

“It’s not asking you to approve \$4.8 million to purchase 11 Belden Ave. although some have thought that’s what the agreement required,” Knopp said. “Rather, what we are purchasing is the opportunity to put the city in the driver’s seat regarding the development of the whole area around the library. Currently, a private developer is in the driver’s seat.”



Hearst Connecticut Media file photo

The parking lot that serves 11 Belden Ave. adjacent to the Norwalk Public Library main branch.

With the signing of the agreement in state Superior Court in Stamford in May, the Norwalk Public Library Foundation withdrew its appeal of the Zoning Commission's approval of a 69-apartment development for the parking lot.

Upon receipt of the \$460,000, 587 CT AVE principal Jason Milligan will withdraw the plan and agree not to submit another development project for the lot without the permission of the city for six years.

That means the city and library will obtain exclusive access to the parking lot for the next six years for \$1 per year under a separate lease or until the city exercises its option to purchase the property.

The Parking Authority got a head start in June by

preemptively accepting the private lot into its inventory and considering three re-configuration options put forward by city engineers.

Under the recommended configuration, the private lot would be combined with the library's 14-space lot. The center island between the two would largely remain, but one-way traffic flow would be created with motorists entering and exiting onto Mott Avenue.

Creating and paving the lot, and installing curbs, new light poles and revenue-collection equipment would run \$191,000 under the recommended reconfiguration, according to city engineers.

Hebert said the Parking Authority has received approval to spend up to \$200,000 on the project,

which it hopes to complete by the end of the year.

"What we're probably going to do is we'll do some kind of change order to one of our existing (construction) contracts," Hebert said. "We'd like to get this done before the end of the year, if at all possible, but there's some coordination that has to be done with the utilities."

Gates and machines will be added to accept validated parking stubs from library users, or cash or credit card payment from nonlibrary users. The latter would pay the prevailing rate of 50 cents per hour to park between 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., and a \$1 flat fee after 6 p.m., according to the Parking Authority.

The old control system — a chain across the entrance to the private parking lot — is already gone.

"The issue before you tonight is whether this chain will go back up on the parking lot behind the library," Knopp, holding the chain, told the council Tuesday evening. "If it does, the 38 to 50 spaces that we anticipate arising from this agreement will be lost, a 69-unit residential development will be constructed, and there will be no opportunity to acquire on-site parking or the opportunity to expand for the library."

"It's really that simple," Knopp said.