

The Norwalk Hour

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MOTT AVENUE

Library patrons welcome added parking

By Robert Koch

NORWALK — Norwalk Public Library patrons welcomed the reopening of a private parking lot on Mott Avenue on Tuesday.

"I'm really happy," said Kathryn Dana, of Norwalk, leaving the Main Library in the after-

noon. "Anything that gets people more to the library and using public services makes me happy."

The day before, the city and Jason Milligan, owner of the lot facing Mott Avenue, settled their differences and signed a revised agreement that opens the lot to the public and sets the

stage for the city to possibly buy the entire parcel to which it belongs at 11 Belden Ave.

Late Monday night, Milligan had the chain blocking entry to the 28-space lot as well as the "No Library Parking" signage removed from the lot.

Norwalk Public Library Director Chris Bradley said the lot

was open when the library opened at 9 a.m. and filled with vehicles shortly afterward. She credited former Mayor Alex Knopp, chairman of the library's board of directors, for spearheading the negotiations that led to the signing of the agreement.

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"He just hung in there for 18 months," Bradley said.

"It's a long process, but we are so thrilled to have parking. It's tough for our people. It's really hard to be driving around the block, looking for space to go to the public library."

Knopp met later Tuesday with Mayor Harry Rilling and Norwalk Parking Authority officials regarding a plan to merge the private lot with the library's 14-space lot.

"We reviewed the design that the parking authority had adopted last June, and discussed the possible construction schedule, which we hope will commence in the spring," Knopp said. "It was a very positive discussion and everybody is looking to move forward."

The parking lot was open to the public for three months last summer under an earlier agreement reached between the city and Milligan, and approved by the Common Council. But issues remained unresolved and Milligan closed the lot when negotiations failed to produce a fruitful outcome.

Under the revised agreement, which city officials describe as minor and not needing council approval, the property line separating 11 Belden Ave. from 15 Belden Ave. has been redrawn slightly to give Milligan additional parking spaces after his loss of the Mott Avenue lot.

The monetary aspects of the agreement remain unchanged. The city will pay Milligan \$460,000 to secure exclusive use of the lot and have six years to decide whether to buy the larger



Milligan

parcel at 11 Belden Ave. for \$4.8 million.

"The agreement is not materially different than

past versions. I am satisfied with the current results," Milligan wrote in an email Tuesday. "I am very disappointed at the process and the speed and the wasted money to get here."

Milligan said the next step should be designing a campus that combines resources and space. The design should expand the library, add on-site parking by "going down or up or both, and still have space to build affordable housing on the larger site."

"The library sits on a very prominent corner and it should look nice, and it should be designed to im-

prove traffic flow, allow for complimentary uses, and take advantage of synergies like shared parking," Milligan wrote. "Unfortunately, consultants who have never built anything will probably need to be hired and the ideas studied for a year or two."

Milligan bought the property at 11 Belden Ave. in February 2015 for \$2.65 million, according to the Tax Assessor's Office, and later received city approval to build 69 apartments in the parking lot facing Mott Avenue. He said Tuesday the agreement essentially brings the parcel back to the time when he purchased it.

"For me, it means that I'm at day one where I bought this property, about exactly where I started," Milligan said. "I don't have a development. I basically got the money back that we spent and we wasted three years."

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