

Oconomowoc Common Council moves forward with eminent domain

Some aldermen show apprehension in use of process

By Amber Gramza
Freeman Staff

OCONOMOWOC – Aldermen approved using eminent domain on the property across the street from the new community center for parking with a 4-3 vote during Tuesday night's meeting.

"There is no power entrusted to us that is greater than to change a person's life, than the ability of ... acquiring and depriving one of their personal property," Mayor Jim Daley said. "Over two years of effort and good-faith negotiations with offers exceeding fair market value were made. ... This has never been an issue of acquisition. They've always been willing to transfer the property; it has only been an issue of valuation."

The vote had Aldermen Jay Larsen, Cathleen Slattery and Mike Miller against with Lora Mae Cochran absent. Economic Development Director Bob Duffy did a presentation explaining city staff has been hosting negotiations with the owners of 219 W. Wisconsin Ave. since June 2010. The city received an appraisal of \$300,000 in August 2010.

According to the Waukesha County tax assessment from last year, the parcel was assessed in 2012 at \$239,900 and is owned by John A. Haas and Ken Herro. Herro could not be reached for comment by deadline.

Duffy said during negotiations, Haas and Herro requested higher prices. He said the owners last January estimated the property had a value of \$650,000 and if the city would pay \$350,000, the owners would claim an IRS gift of \$300,000. According to www.irs.gov, a gift tax is a "tax on the transfer of property by one individual to another while receiving nothing, or less than full value, in return."

"The price never became more reasonable and continued to escalate," Duffy said.

The city did another property appraisal in 2012 for a depreciated value of \$250,000. City Attorney Bill Chap-

man said the city then proposed potential arbitration, using a third party from outside Waukesha County to make the final decision for the price. Haas and Herro had until 5 p.m. Tuesday night to give the city a written statement agreeing to the arbitration and did not meet the deadline.

"I have a problem with taking their property," said Miller. "I think we have enough parking. I just don't like the idea of taking it from them."

Slattery agreed with Miller, saying from a philosophical standpoint, she didn't agree.

"In the timeline we have been consistent with our offers and they've had very different offers," Alderman David Nold said. "We've gone through this far enough. ... I hate to see it done this way, but I fully support the actions."

An appraisal from Herro and Haas by Lauenstein & Associates put the property at \$515,000 in October. One of the city's attorneys, John Van Lieshout, said the difference comes from the appraiser supposing the zoning of the property will change.

"The report indicates the current zoning is transitional and that it will be changed to mixed-commercial use," he said. "That would lead it to having a higher value and the appraisal the city has is based on the current zoning of residential."

Duffy said the money had been budgeted within the community center project.

The property is located inside the City Beach/Community Centerview Redevelopment, and was next to city-owned houses that were razed at 225 W. Wisconsin Ave. and 231 W. Wisconsin Ave. that are in the beginning stages of an apartment complex called The Worthington.

The council approved the Community Development Authority's commencement of condemnation proceedings for the property and although there is a possibility a resolution may still take place, it will continue to take steps in the eminent domain process and possibly will see future legal action.

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Charles Auer/Freeman Staff

Juniors Paul Burrie, left, and Evan Gilgenbach work on the early stages of programming the CORE 2062 robot with parent and mentor Al Gilgenbach on Tuesday at Waukesha South High School. CORE 2062 is building a robot that will both shoot Frisbees with accuracy and climb a metal pyramid to score points.

Robotics team goes beyond nuts and bolts

Marketing, teamwork part of robotics competitions

By Josh Perttunen
Freeman Staff

WAUKESHA – The members of the high school robotics team in Waukesha realize that the effort of building a robot is ultimately about more than just the sum of its parts.

Just as important as the robots that the Community Of Robotic Engineers (CORE 2062) enter into regional competitions – to perform predetermined tasks such as shooting a basketball, kicking a soccer ball and hanging things from a hook 11 feet off the ground – is the promotion of what has been built, what has been learned by students of all three public high schools and the teamwork that was used to accomplish these goals.

The excitement of competition is what initially draws young people to the team, said Wendy Copeland, marketing mentor and mother of two students on the team.

"They are very excited about learning," she said. "It's not only about building

the robot, but supporting the team."

With the guidance of mentors from within the school and the community, students completely drive this process. While some work on the manufacture of the robots, other facets of the team work on the design, electrical systems, programming, marketing, branding and presentation of the robots to the public and judges.

This year, all team members are working toward the mission of building and promoting the robots entered into the FIRST regionals in Duluth, Minn. on March 7-9 and at Milwaukee's US Cellular Arena on March 21-23.

The task at hand

The tasks the robots must perform at these competitions changes each year, dependent on the category. Under the "Ultimate Ascent" category, a robot is required to launch Frisbees into three slots, which shrink in size and rise in points as they get higher off the ground. The robots must also climb a pyramid that is comprised of 60-degree angles.

"When we found out the challenge, we thought it was going to be hard," said lead mentor and teacher Mark Spoerk. "When we started preparing for it, we found it was going to be even harder."

The disc launcher portion has been successful in prototype, putting the discs in the top slot every time, Spoerk added, but climbing the pyramid is still a challenge that must be worked out.

Everybody hard at work

To complete their entries and all of the associated tasks, there is a section of the team at work almost every day of the week, Copeland said. Students also devote a portion of their weekend to the project, coming in every Saturday for the duration of the six-week season.

"It's an increasing amount of hard work. Team members put in so many hours," Copeland said. "We say it is the hardest fun you'll ever have."

The goal at regionals is to move on to the FIRST Robotics Competition Championship in St. Louis April 24-27. It's not always about

finishing first in the tasks portion of the competition, Copeland said.

"It's about the big picture," Copeland said. "It's about being active in the community; there is a three-member presentation and team members write an essay on what they've done to get the community excited about science, technology, engineering and math."

The essay is what helps teams earn the coveted Chairman's Award, given to teams as an all-around award.

Many different roles

Many are surprised that CORE 2062 effort goes beyond the nuts and bolts.

There are many aspects of the team that people might not consider until they are involved in the process, Copeland said. She herself is responsible for mentoring a group of marketing students. By promoting what they have done, they raise funds to combine with the school's contribution, which rounds out their funding needs.

Her son Daniel Copeland is captain of the group's safety team. This is another aspect people may not readily associate with robot-building efforts, he said. It wasn't until his friend encouraged him to explore this role that he discovered the vital role this group plays.

"I had no idea safety was such a big part of it," he said. "Given the big machinery we work with, it makes sense. We want everyone to be safe around them."

To prepare parts for the robots' construction, students use disc sanders, drill presses, band saws and band miter saws. In back-to-back years, the group has been recognized at the international competitions for its stellar safety record.

Some of the red flags students are expected to catch are when Daniel Copeland has his safety glasses resting on the top of his head or when he puts his hand too close to the guides.

Daniel Copeland has toured factories that use the same equipment as the club does and reviewed their policies. He complemented this experience with research done online.

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Brookfield committee tables referral to reduce council size

Members and mayor express opposition, want to get more feedback

By Katherine Michalets
Special to The Freeman

BROOKFIELD – After every Legislative & Licensing Committee member expressed opposition to decreasing the size of the Common Council on Tuesday, the committee voted to table the referral made by Alderman Scott Berg to reduce the number of aldermen from 14 to nine.

Berg's referral also includes changing the number of aldermanic districts from seven to nine. Currently there are two aldermen for each of the seven districts. Berg addressed the committee Tuesday and said he felt reducing the number the aldermen and giving them smaller districts would improve constituents' representation. He also feels that there would be fewer tie votes and more contested races.

A reduction in aldermen, he feels, would also result in committee reorganization with fewer committees and fewer aldermen on a committee. Berg had to leave before discussion ended on his referral because he serves on the Finance Committee, which was meeting at the same time.

The Legislative & Licensing Committee voted 4-1 to table the referral with Alderman Dan Sutton voting against tabling it.

Sutton said he would have liked Berg to have been able to be there for the entire discussion.

Mayor Steve Ponto attended the meeting and spoke against the referral, reiterating a point he made earlier that if everything is working well there is no need to change it.

Other committee members said they like having 14 aldermen on the council because that means there are more perspectives expressed on a topic.

Sutton shared an experience about when he sought re-election recently.

The person challenging him for the seat was running on the idea of reducing the council size. Sutton said he went door-to-door campaigning and explained the many reasons why he felt a larger council was better for government operations in Brookfield.

He said after he shared his opinions on maintaining the council size, the constituents agreed with him.

Committee Chairman and Alderman Gary Mahkorn said he wanted to table the referral until the other nine aldermen not present at the meeting could weigh in on the topic.

IN BRIEF

Twelve arrests made during police OWI deployment

BROOKFIELD – Twelve arrests were made by participating police departments in Saturday's state Department of Transportation's Southeast Wisconsin High-Visibility OWI Enforcement.

In an email accompanying statistics from the OWI Enforcement, Brookfield Capt. Phil Horter, who is the HVE OWI Task Force media liaison, said arrests were made for a sixth offense and a third-offense charge of operating while under the influence and OWI arrests were also made after a couple of crashes.

"That is why we do this – to provide safety for the public," he wrote in the email. "If we cannot defer this activity, we can certainly enforce through arrest."

According to the release, Wauwatosa police officers made two OWI arrests and gave out nine citations; Franklin police gave out

nine citations; St. Francis police had two OWI arrests and six citations; Elm Grove police gave out three citations; Brookfield police made one OWI arrest and gave out two citations; the Wisconsin State Patrol made two arrests and gave out 12 citations; Hales Corners police gave out 14 citations; Greenfield police gave out five citations; West Allis gave out nine citations; the Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office made two OWI arrests and gave out 29 citations; the Milwaukee Police Department made three OWI arrests and gave out 15 citations; and the Town of Brookfield police gave out seven citations.

Man shot by deputy last week released from hospital

WAUKESHA – The Town of Delafield man who was shot and wounded by a Waukesha County Sheriff's Department deputy after refusing to surrender a shotgun last week has been

released from Froedtert Hospital.

Justin Ebbe, 31, is now in the sheriff's department's custody, said Jennifer Wallschlaeger, the department's public information officer. Wallschlaeger declined to disclose exactly where he is.

On Jan. 8, a 911 caller reported that Ebbe, a family member, had a shotgun and was suicidal at a home in the Town of Delafield.

The caller said two other family members were in the home, and Ebbe had fired the shotgun, but hadn't wounded anyone.

Deputies confronted Ebbe outside the home, ordering him to surrender the shotgun. He refused and was subsequently shot and wounded by Michael Doud, 52, a 22-year veteran of the Waukesha County Sheriff's Department.

Doud is now on desk duty as the Walworth County Sheriff's Department investigates the shooting. As yet, no charges have been filed against Ebbe.