

Station 2 transfer negotiations underway

- By Steven Collins Senior Reporter
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CIRCLEVILLE — Paving a pathway to sell the property, Circleville City Council has agreed to authorize the mayor and the city law director to enter a development agreement with Southern Ohio Development Group to transfer the former Station 2 along South Court Street.

The measure will pave the way to transfer the .9 acres of property to the developer who bought the South Court Street School property, immediately south to the fire station, earlier this spring. The measure was approved unanimously by city council recently.

Ryan Scribner, executive director at Pickaway Progress Partnership (P3), spoke about what the sale means for the property and the community.

“You have a property that’s been determined to not be adequate or sufficient to be used as a fire station as it had been in the past,” he said. “It’s a property that sits in a very strategic location with significant investment in the area, like with the Court Street Connector, and will facilitate economic development and growth in the area.”

However, due to that growth and recent changes in the area, Scribner said the building is in the way of a better use of the property, citing that it creates no revenue for the city.

“The city took the step a few years ago to create a TIF district or Tax Increment Financing District, along the 23 corridor that includes this property,” he said. “The TIF lets the city capture a larger share of new property tax dollars than it normally would. Right now a dollar of property tax collected is about 13 cents. With the TIF district, the city will get 60 cents of each new property tax dollar.”

Safety Force Director Terry Frazier said the station is too small for their fire trucks and outfitting the station to meet necessary requirements is not cost effective.

“The trucks are getting larger and taller and the building was originally a Buick garage at one point,” Frazier said. “It was an adaptive reuse in 1989 for a fire station for a while but new operates will not fit. We recently got a new truck and we’re filing grants for additional apparatus that will not fit it.”

Other questions included what would happen to Pickaway County Visitation Services, an organization that offers supervised visits between parents and their children as required by the courts, and where they would go following the building’s sale.

Don McIlroy, Circleville's mayor, said they're under contract through the end of December and they've since been relocated to the former P3 building on West Franklin Street.

"All their consultations will be at night so none of the traffic will be on the streets, it worked out great for everyone," he said. "We just need to decide if they stay there after Dec. 31 and if that makes sense."

Scribner said it's not often that P3 is used to transfer publicly owned property to a private entity, but they have done it before like with the Everts School.

"It was not something the city had a use for and there was a productive, better private use for it," he said. "So we can help in the transfer for a property like that. It's something public entities have the ability to do."

Scribner said the Southern Ohio Development Corporation, which purchased the South Court Street School that was razed and is ready for development after the site was cleaned up.

"The potential for [the former fire station building] to be combined with the existing 6-acre former school, with a white canvas on a site that's clean, with utilities and zoning in place, that makes it ready for impactful development," he said. "The difference between what it provides now and what it could provide is hundreds of thousands of dollars annually."

Scribner said the ordinance will allow P3 to help the property be utilized to its full potential with a private entity.

"As a part of the draft development agreement, they'll demo the site, to remediate the property at their expense, to develop the property to a new use that's compatible with the city's development goals and to also work with the city to ensure that as the property is developed that traffic and accessibility is consistent with the city's planning efforts and development that is likely to happen across the street."

Scribner said there are layers of reasoning and rationale for the project.

"The bottom line is that's a safe thing that protects the city from any environmental liability there, it's strategic for the potential significant increase in revenue for the city as the property is developed, and is fair," he said. "The property has some value but we're talking about the cost to demo, remediate, and make it ready versus .9 acres which has limited value by itself but will have significant value when it's clean, shovel ready and combined with the parcel to the south."