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Big Picture . Local Focus

First Street project gets OK'd by council

By Lisa Smith
Daily Herald Staff Writer
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In a move more than four years in the making, the St. Charles City Council on Monday unanimously approved the biggest redevelopment plan in the city's history.

Under the agreement, the city will commit \$25 million to the \$105 million First Street redevelopment project. The balance will be funded by a private development group headed by St. Charles developer Bob Rasmussen.

"It's a very aggressive project, but ... it will redefine downtown St. Charles for the next 100 years," said Mayor Don DeWitte.

Monday's approval was largely symbolic, as demolition was completed over the summer and utility relocation and infrastructure work began two months ago along the six-block stretch. A redeveloped First Street, complete with mixed-use buildings, parking decks and a community square, is projected to open in 2012.

The city council approved eight separate motions, half of which related to the project's public funding. Funds from a tax increment financing district and bond sale will be used to pay for the city's share of the project.

City officials did not publicly address recent objections to the project raised by park district officials. In a letter sent to the city three weeks ago, St. Charles Park District board President Gloria Klimek asked city officials to revisit the plan on the grounds that it conflicts with a Fox River improvement plan adopted by the city, park district and Downtown St. Charles Partnership in 2002.

Klimek said the First Street plan fails to include enough open space and lacks a gathering place for large community events.

When asked to respond to Klimek's concerns after Monday's meeting, DeWitte said the plan has received positive feedback recently from the city plan commission, as well as a Downtown St. Charles Partnership committee.

"We believed we had enough consensus within the community to move forward," DeWitte said.

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