

Council hires consultant to review city garage proposals

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The College Park City Council approved hiring a consultant to analyze the final four proposals for a downtown parking garage and help city officials determine the logistics behind the city's priority project.

In a special session Tuesday night, City Manager Sam Finz and City Planning Director Terry Schum gave the council the names of three firms - UniDev LLC, Bolan Smart Associates Inc. and Basile Baumann Prost & Associates Inc. - that are interested in helping the city build the facility.

"We've developed this idea [of a parking garage] and it's really evolved," Finz said. "We thought we could just go in and look at it as parking, but what's come out of here is one of the most major projects the city will undertake probably in its history ... We need to do this right and a consultant will help us at a minimal cost to the city."

Each firm charges hourly for their services, with UniDev charging the most at a total cost of \$40,000 or less. Finz and Schum recommended the council hire this firm because the company gives the city the ability to pass the cost along to developers, alleviating the city of the financial burden.

Bolan Smart Associates Inc. said it would charge \$25,000 or less for the consulting services and Basile Baumann Prost & Associates Inc. set a price of \$21,000 or less.

Finz said the city's staff recommended UniDev because of its level of expertise.

"We were the most impressed with UniDev," he said. "Although it is the most expensive, they offer us the opportunity to cover all our costs in the future."

Several council members were concerned about the high price, saying they didn't understand how UniDev could justify spending more and they were unsure if the city would be able to make the money back in the future.

"I don't understand what UniDev gives us that is worth \$15,000 more than all the other companies," said District 3 Councilman Eric Olson.

Several other council members agreed, and the council ultimately approved an amendment stating that unless UniDev could drop its price to \$35,000 or less, the council will hire Bolan Smart Associates Inc.

Schum said while all of the companies have worked with parking structures in the past, UniDev has worked the most with tax incremental financing districts - a district that would tax local businesses who would benefit most from a parking garage - which is the city's chief financing option for the pricey endeavor. Officials estimate the garage could cost between \$1 and \$4 million.

She also said the city's staff was most impressed with the company's creative energy.

"It was our personal interaction with UniDev that [sold us] more than the actual technicalities," Schum said. "With the other two companies there wasn't that spark or creative energy that we felt with the

first. If we want someone to really work with us on this project, I think UniDev is the best option."

Whichever consultant the city hires will analyze the four proposals for the parking garage submitted by developers. All of the proposals entail razing the current City Hall building and constructing a mixed-used development, consisting of parking, retail, office space and in one case, a hotel, on the site.

Otis Warren and Company - the development team currently building the University View housing project on Route 1 - would incorporate a new City Hall into the building as well as 114 residential units, retail space and 316 parking spaces.

The company also said it would like to purchase the Special Lot site, situated behind Cornerstone Grill and Loft, and construct a four-story 316-space parking garage. The company's president, Otis Warren, said Marriott Hotels expressed interest in building a full-service hotel on the site.

JPI Development is the second company vying for the opportunity to enhance the downtown area, suggesting a four-or five-story building with apartments or townhouses and retail space. The plan also includes 384 parking spaces.

Capstone Development Company - the company that built and manages the South Campus Commons buildings - proposed building an eight-story high-rise building on the corner of Knox Road and Yale Avenue. An underground parking garage would accompany office space, retail and 108 residential units, which would not be targeted at students.

The final company, RCP Development - which is also looking to purchase and renovate the Berwyn House apartments - proposed building 30,000 square feet of retail space, 194 residential units and an underground parking garage.

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