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September 02, 2005 - Officials Hope Land Sales Will Bring Downtown to Life

Port Huron leaders want to sell one of the city's aging and unprofitable marinas to the Acheson Charitable Foundation.

The effort comes after several years of trying to improve the 374-slip Water Street Marina on the Black River on the city's west side.

The City Council on Tuesday is expected to approve putting the issue on the Nov. 8 ballot. According to the city charter, voters first must approve any rental, lease or development of waterfront property.

Also appearing on the ballot will be a proposal to sell a downtown parking lot near the Black River. That sale would be to a private developer.

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Foundation spokespersons were unavailable for comment Thursday. Paul Maxwell, spokesman for development company Acheson Ventures, confirmed the intention and said the sale would breathe new life into the marina.

"We're hoping to improve the overall appearance," he said.

The city closed the marina in 2002 because it was losing money but reopened it in 2004 with a staff of dock workers who were not paid a salary but instead given use of a slip for free.

Efforts to make the marina profitable have failed, City Manager Tom Hutka said, and the amount of seasonal slip leases is lower than ever.

"We take a loss every year on that operation," he said.

Voters also will be asked to approve the sale of the city-owned west Quay Street parking lot. The lot is featured in a plan to develop several city-owned parking lots into mixed residential and commercial areas.

Developer Terra Land Group has presented ideas for building on the lots.

In connection with that plan, the City Council, the Downtown Development Authority and members of the St. Clair County Community College board of trustees plan to hear about a parking study that's considered one of the final steps before a deal is reached with the developer.

Source: The Times Herald

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