

FIVE FLAGS: Work session set for Dec. 5 to further discuss possibilities

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require voter approval through a referendum.

Instead, Van Milligen said the city would utilize \$6 million in downtown urban renewal debt capacity already reserved for improvements at Five Flags, along with \$18 million in downtown urban renewal debt capacity reserved for building a parking ramp as part of a development agreement with Roshek Property LLC; Cottingham & Butler; and HTLF.

This week, City Council members approved amending

that development agreement to postpone the construction of the ramp until nearby parking capacity reaches 85%.

With the parking ramp on hold for the foreseeable future, Van Milligen said the city can invest those funds into Five Flags.

Historically, Civic Center Commission members have consistently called for the city to make a large investment in Five Flags, including supporting the most recent proposal to spend more than \$90 million for a project that included the demolition of the existing center and the construction

of a larger facility that could seat about 6,400 and expand across West Fifth Street, along with making improvements to Five Flags Theater.

However, in March, City Council members voted to not pursue that project, determining it to be too expensive.

This week, Commission Member Bryce Parks said he still hopes the city can pursue a project that goes beyond a limited renovation of the existing facility. He suggested the city devote an additional \$10 million to the new proposal in order to open up the north wall of Five Flags to cre-

ate new outdoor event space that connects with the arena, an idea previously suggested by now-former Five Flags General Manager H.R. Cook.

That additional \$10 million would require voter approval through a referendum in order to be secured.

"I think that possibility is much more palatable," Parks said. "It makes it not just more solvent, but it also makes it a model for other communities to follow."

Christner said the limited renovation scenario does not address the current need to add more bathrooms at Five

Flags or make it easier to navigate for patrons.

On the other hand, Commission Member McKenzie Blau said she is doubtful that the city could successfully move forward with any referendum.

"I think COVID completely took the steam out of our sails," she said, later indicating her support for the new limited renovation proposal. "I think it's great, though it's obviously not everything that we wanted."

Van Milligen stressed that the city does not need to strictly follow the scenario laid out

in 2018. If the City Council chooses to move forward with simply spending the \$24 million the city has at hand on Five Flags the details of the renovation will be revisited. He added that the Civic Center Commission would be able to recommend what renovations should be prioritized.

"Should the council say that is our budget for the project, we would then determine what we would buy for that budget," Van Milligen said. "It's not set in stone."

City Council members will further discuss the proposal during a work session on Dec. 5.

FRIENDS: Gatherings can be helpful for those without family nearby

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dictionary in January 2020.

The dictionary notes that the earliest print use of "Friendsgiving" appears to be in 2007, with the term quickly gaining national prominence from 2012 onward. From 2013 to 2019, the number of people invited to a Friendsgiving celebration on social planning website Evite jumped from about 100,000 to more than 580,000, according to Axios.

For some people, Friendsgiving replaces a family Thanksgiving celebration, but many others celebrate both holidays, often hosting Friendsgiving shortly before or after turkey day, so that attendees can be with their families on that day.

Merrick, for example, always plans her Friendsgiving for the Saturday before Thanksgiving.

"It just seems like everybody's giddy because it's a shorter week the following week, and it preps everybody for Thanksgiving," she said.

She prepares the requisite turkey and mashed potatoes, with each guest bringing a side dish to add to



STEPHEN GASSMAN • Telegraph Herald

Guests play a game of euchre while others watch the Iowa-Minnesota football game on the big screen at Meggan Merrick's Friendsgiving.

the feast. The group enjoys party games, including a prize for the diner who ends up with the paper plate that has a paper turkey taped to the back of it.

"Last year, I gave a turkey waffle maker for the prize," Merrick said. "Sometimes, somebody will bring

their karaoke machine, and we just let the kids run wild and play. It's all very family-oriented and casual."

Arianna Webb and her husband, Logan, have hosted a Friendsgiving celebration in their Dubuque apartment since at least 2018. Ten to 20 people attend, mainly friends

from the Bible study groups to which the couple belongs, and the group shares a turkey dinner and plays board games.

"It's just a fun thing, especially for those people who might not have immediate family in town ... so it's always good to have at least some sort of Thanksgiving for them if they can't make it to one with their family as well," Webb said.

COMING TOGETHER

For Bernard, Iowa, resident Shnette Adams, an annual Friendsgiving celebration brings joy and comradeship to a difficult time of the year for her family.

Adams' 16-year-old son, Justin Shaffer, died on Nov. 30, 2015, as a result of injuries sustained in a car crash on Thanksgiving days earlier.

Beginning in 2016, Adams, her husband and children have hosted Friendsgiving on Nov. 30 in Justin's memory. Around 50 friends and neighbors typically gather at the Bernard fire station near Adams' home, where they enjoy sloppy Joes and other similar potluck fare.

"I enjoy it greatly," she said.

"I find it fun to get together and socialize. It's such a sad time of year for us, with (the anniversary of Justin's death), so when we have people come over, it really lifts our spirits. ... We sit back and relax, laugh and cry and have all kinds of good times."

This year, Adams is adding a competitive twist to the gathering. Attendees will bring different types of soups and desserts for a tasting contest, and Adams and her daughter will serve as the judges, awarding money and lottery tickets to the winners.

"I love different kinds of soup, and I consider myself to have fine taste, so I thought that would be fun to make it a little bit of a contest," she said.

Whatever the menu, the date or the number of attendees at a Friendsgiving celebration, local hosts agree that the people are the most important part.

"I think at the heart of it, we just really love tradition, and it's just been super fun to be able to host all of our friends," said Adrianna Webb.

EXPRESSION: Question remains whether flags equal political activity

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of the employee expression policy after hearing from students, parents, teachers and community members both in favor of and against the flags. Similar concerns were shared at this week's meeting.

Several residents opposed to the flags' presence in the classroom argued that they send a political message and violate the district's policy on employee political activity.

Supporters of the flags said they create an atmosphere of inclusion and safety, particularly for students of color and members of the LGBTQ+ community. Multiple speakers said they or their children ex-

perienced racist or otherwise hurtful interactions at school, and the flags in Kennedy's classroom helped create an environment that combated that.

"Ms. Kennedy is not teaching, preaching or forcing any student to support these symbols or ideas," said parent Dawn Hutchin. "She is simply showing solidarity to a minority in a racially charged school environment."

Resident Judene Berggren said that while she understands the flags make some students feel safe or accepted, school board members also should consider the feelings of students who might be offended by them.

"There are different types of students, and you need to weigh out the two sides when you make your decision," she said.

Board members agreed with residents' concerns, voiced both this week and at last month's meeting, that the directive that displays be focused on curriculum could forbid teachers from displaying items such as seasonal decorations or family pictures.

"I think it would have way too many unintended consequences, as people have talked about, and it would be a nightmare to try to enforce," said School Board Member Tom Miller. "I think these other policies that we already have ... ad-

dress some of the issues around this."

Board members referred to three existing district policies that prohibit employees from engaging in political activity on property under board jurisdiction and state that teachers must not advocate partisan causes, religious views or propaganda when teaching controversial subjects.

"However, an instructor will not be prohibited from expressing a personal opinion as long as students are encouraged to reach their own decisions independently," board policy states.

After the meeting, Superintendent Tara Notz said that by amending the employee expression policy to reference the

political activity and teaching of controversial subjects policies, the issue of the flags would fall under the purview of those policies.

She said the district's administrative team will discuss whether the flags constitute political activity and make a recommendation to the board in the coming months as to how to proceed. For now, the flags can remain in Kennedy's classroom.

"We'll continue to work through the details, and this will be something we'll continue to communicate out to staff and students as to what

that really means for the next steps," Notz said.

School board members pledged that no matter the outcome of the flag issue, district officials would work to create a more inclusive environment to address the racism and harassment that students and parents had shared. Several mentioned the possibility of restarting a "diversity club" that the district previously sponsored.

"Whether the flags stay or go, I think the underlying message that's come to us is that we may not be meeting the needs of some of our students," said School Board Member Terry Creagan. "... We just need to figure out what steps will work (to address that)."



Tara Notz

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