



NEWS RELEASE

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City of Beaufort will consider key Carteret Street property for parking, redevelopment, expanding ‘downtown’

In response to one of the principal recommendations of the city’s Blue Ribbon Parking Task Force, the Beaufort City Council on Dec. 15 will consider giving the city manager authority to negotiate the purchase of 1.14 acres at 500 Carteret Street to provide over 75 additional parking spaces in the downtown area.

An 18,000-square foot office building comes with the package and, should the purchase go through, the Beaufort Redevelopment Commission would develop a plan to use the building as it exists, lease it to non-profit organizations or partner with developers.

The parcel is among the largest commercial lots in the city’s National Historic Landmark District and celebrates a prime location a block from the Beaufort Visitors Center, a block and a half from the Downtown Library and is three blocks from Bay Street and the Henry C. Chambers Waterfront Park.

The City Council’s interest results from recommendations by the Blue Ribbon Parking Task Force final report, which referenced the loss of public parking spaces since 1998; the Beaufort Civic Master Plan’s guidance; and the commercial possibilities the site offers for business recruitment and future development, Beaufort Mayor Billy Keyserling said.

“Ideally I think we would like to see the building back in private hands and back on the tax rolls soon, but we first need to better understand community needs and the market” before a final determination is made. “That being said, the City doesn’t intend to offer spaces in competition with downtown landlords.”

To buy 500 Carteret Street, the city likely would use the land fund; some of the proceeds from the sale of other unneeded city property now on the market; the parking fund; and the redevelopment fund. That fund will grow by \$725,000 next month when the city sells the former U.S. Post Office/City Hall to Lowcountry Produce, Keyserling said.

“We can make this purchase at no added cost to taxpayers and no long-term debt on our balance sheet, and we believe the return will greatly benefit and enhance the city,” he said.

Should the purchase go through, City staff, with assistance from the Parking Committee and the Beaufort Redevelopment Commission, would be asked to develop a management plan for the property as part of the budget plan for the 2016/2017 fiscal year that starts July 1.

This would include short and long-term parking needs and improvements in tourism-related activities such as a possible transportation center.

Furthermore, the Redevelopment Commission would work to attract new businesses to the downtown area and continue discussions with developers who have expressed interest in some type of public/private partnerships for the future development of the site.

“Overall, this location would provide us with parking relief, an increase of almost 15 percent of our current paid parking spaces for the next few years, and address the employee parking issues that have been identified. That helps us while the plans for a parking garage are developed, a location is selected and finances are identified,” Beaufort City Manager Bill Prokop said.

“Once the parking garage issue is settled, the property at 500 Carteret may be better suited for other uses and/or sale to a private developer or a public/private venture that would be of benefit to the City, just as we are currently doing with the sale of the old City Hall,” he said.

“This could be an important acquisition that supports the recommendations of our Parking Task Force and helps us address issues and goals the City has to face over the next few years.”

Based on preliminary calculations by city staff, additional revenue would begin the first of the year by immediately converting this area to paid parking as part of Beaufort’s overall parking program.

The Beaufort City Council and Prokop listed key reasons the 500 Carteret purchase could be a cornerstone for growth and economic development in the city:

1. The site addresses the need for additional parking in the downtown, as pointed out in the Parking Task Force report – which recommended this site as a prime location -- and the Beaufort Civic Master Plan. The site has paved, open parking and is close to the current core commercial areas of Bay and Port Republic streets.
2. Its unparalleled location on Carteret Street offers high visibility and can accommodate traffic necessary to support parking, retail and office needs.
3. It offers the opportunity for the City to provide office space for start-up businesses or established businesses wanting prime downtown location at competitive prices if the private sector doesn’t have the inventory.
4. It is one of the largest parcels of land, 1.14 acres, in the downtown core area with street frontage and access on four sides.
5. The opportunity exists to make this a self-sustaining operation within a three- to five-year period. The initial cost will be offset by the use of funds from the sale of other unneeded city property, including the former U.S. Post Office at Carteret and Port Republic streets.
6. The location would provide the opportunity to move other government services to this location that would benefit residents and visitors alike. It could be considered as a farmer’s market location, a site for a downtown police sub-station, and could provide parking for downtown employees and others.

7. It may be a “stepping stone” for commercial expansion of the downtown, moving it toward Boundary Street. Part of the Civic Master Plan addresses expanding the perception of “Downtown Beaufort” beyond the current three blocks bounded by Bay, Carteret, Port Republic and Charles streets.
8. It could be a short-term investment marketed to private investors after the long-term parking issues of the City are finalized. There are currently several investors who have expressed interest in this site.
9. This can be done without any additional impact on city taxpayers and with no effect on the city’s long-term borrowing capabilities.
10. It addresses the city’s parking needs and supports local economic development goals to help stimulate job creation.

One of the goals of the Beaufort Redevelopment Commission is to grow the city’s economy to lessen the dependency on tax dollars to fund the maintenance and improvement of the city infrastructure. Another goal is to work with downtown businesses and property owners to continually improve the vibrancy of the downtown from Bay to Boundary Street.

“The potential acquisition of 500 Carteret Street addresses both of those goals, and it also is a step toward expanding what many people consider to be our ‘downtown’ to a larger area,” said Jon Verity, chairman of the Beaufort Redevelopment Commission. “Once we get people more accustomed to walking a few blocks to visit stores, restaurants, galleries and offices, we can take another step to create a larger, stronger and more vibrant downtown.”

The Redevelopment Commission recommends the City purchase 500 Carteret to advance and fulfill the goals of the commission, the Parking Task Force, and the Civic Master Plan.

To read more of the Parking Task Force report, visit www.cityofbeaufort.org, click on Parking Information on the right side, then scroll to the Parking Task Force report.

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