

Council approves \$5M grant for transit facility

Rebuild Illinois grant can be used for engineering and local match for project

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DeKALB – DeKalb city officials green-lighted a multimillion-dollar state grant awarded to the city to help fund the construction of a new transit facility.

DeKalb City Manager Bill Nicklas told the City Council during its Monday meeting that the city was notified back in November that the Illinois Department of Transportation awarded a \$5 million Rebuild Illinois grant to the city. He said \$1 million of the state grant would go toward architectural, engineering and construction management work for the project,

while \$4 million would go toward either local match for more funds or it could be used for more construction costs.

“The federal government has, during the COVID-19 pandemic, found money to pump into public transit and we’re the beneficiary of that right now,” Nicklas told the council. “So we heartily recommend your support of this.”

The DeKalb City Council voted, 8-0, to approve authorizing the intergovernmental agreement with IDOT during the Monday meeting. Second Ward Alderman Bill Finucane was the only alderman who attended the meeting via Zoom.

Sixth Ward Alderman Mike Verbic said he thinks the grant is great for the near term, but his concern continues to be developing the center in a floodplain. He said he’s also not sure if the

city has put together its long-term obligations or liabilities for the project from the standpoint of maintaining the facility and paying electric bill, for example.

“I don’t want us to get too far in until we have all of those things figured out,” Verbic said. “So we don’t come back to the taxpayers and say, ‘Oh, by the way, we need to ask you for more money to support this.’ Because if that was the case, then we would want to ask them to vote on this versus just saying, ‘Here’s your bill.’”

Nicklas said to Verbic his points were well taken and heard back in November. He said part of design isn’t to start work now and start throwing floor plans together immediately.

“This is all part of the discussion that we have to have and this is a ‘show me’ opportunity for us to bring

you what we consider to be a plausible construction project that will serve those transit needs,” Nicklas said. “And if you say, ‘I don’t like the plan ... I don’t want to spend the money on that,’ then that’s the council’s prerogative.”

The council previously supported using vacant city-owned property along Dresser Road, near DeKalb Fire Station 3, as the site for the new transit facility, according to city officials.

Finucane, who has a background in public transportation, said the city has been working toward the construction of this facility for years.

“And to see some of the state and federal dollars finally flowing into town to help us get going on this project is very gratifying,” Finucane said. “... It’s really something that the city and the citizens of DeKalb and DeKalb County can look forward to.”