

Proposed Vail parking structure plan killed

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VAIL — During the past four years, the town of Vail and Vail Valley Medical Center have tried to find a way for the medical center to use part of the town's municipal complex. That search continues.

A closely-divided Vail Town Council voted Tuesday, 3-2, (members Jenn Bruno and Dale Bugby were absent) to stop further planning work on a possible 250-space parking structure for the western half of the municipal campus property. Council members Margaret Rogers, Greg Moffet and Dave Chapin voted to stop the work. Mayor Andy Daly and council member Ludwig Kurz voted to keep planning the structure.

Rogers, who moved to stop the planning work, said town staff members have simply spent enough time on the idea.

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

“I think it's foolish for us to spend this kind of money if there are other solutions available.” Margaret Rogers Vail Town Council member

The idea to build a parking structure stems from a plan developed in 2011 and 2012. That plan would have seen the town sell the western half of its municipal campus to a partnership of the medical center, the Steadman Clinic and the Steadman Philippon Research Institute, and Howard Head Sports Medicine.

That partnership then would have built a medical office building and parking structure on the property. The town would have used the roughly \$5 million from the land sale to help fund a new town hall.

TAKE TWO

That plan fell apart in late 2012, when the Steadman Clinic partners decided to withdraw. Since then, the medical center has completed and received town approval for a master plan for a \$100 million expansion on its current campus. During that process, the town and medical center talked for a while in 2014 about building a 250-space parking structure, with the medical center to use the structure during the work week, and parking then being available to weekend visitors.

'GUT REACTION'

Vail Community Development Department Director George Ruther said Tuesday that the deal with the medical center could possibly be revived if the town moved ahead. But Rogers and Moffet both balked at further work. Rogers questioned the wisdom of even a joint venture on the property.

“My gut reaction is that I don't want to give up any more land for use besides anyone but the town of Vail. My gut reaction is that (medical center) parking should be on (medical center) land,” she said.

Daly favored further exploration of the idea, calling it a “piece of a solution to our long-term parking problems.”

Kurz agreed that the structure could be part of a long-term answer to Vail's chronic struggles with guest parking. But, he added, “I'm concerned that we're overwhelming this site,” with ideas for educational or other facilities there.

PROJECT COSTS

Cost played a big role in stopping further work on a parking structure. While firm estimates haven't been done, Moffet said the cost could be \$125,000 or more per space.

Chapin said the town needs to be "very careful" what it eventually plans for the site in question, given its proximity to the heart of the town of Vail's resort areas.

Ultimately, Rogers said, "I think it's foolish for us to spend this kind of money if there are other solutions available."

Vail Daily Business Editor Scott Miller can be reached at 970-748-2930, smiller@vaildaily.com and @scottnmiller.