

New Albany backs Scribner Place

Final commitment depends on county

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The New Albany City Council approved a resolution last night committing the city to help finance the Scribner Place development -- but it included a requirement that county government provide half of the public money.

If the county refuses, City Council members said they will have to reconsider the city's commitment.

But Steve Bush, a member of the Floyd County Board of Commissioners who watched the meeting, said afterward that with other pressing projects, "it's going to be tough" to win a long-term commitment from the county.

The county is working on plans to build a new government annex, expected to cost \$6 million to \$7 million. And crowding in the Floyd County Jail is likely to require an expensive jail expansion -- so it may be difficult to win a 17-year commitment of county economic development taxes for Scribner Place, Bush said.

He also said he fears some county officials will be angry about the City Council's attempt to require county participation.

But he said he believes the council took an important step, and "I'd like to see us still contribute."

The City Council also voted to provide a guarantee of the funding with property taxes if there isn't enough economic development income-tax revenue to cover the Scribner financing.

Mayor James Garner said he believes the council vote means Scribner Place will be built.

Based on recent estimates by bond consultants and with the property tax guarantee approved by the council, only \$275,000 a year may be required in bond payments by the city and county, Garner said.

He said he's optimistic about county government's participation.

Scribner Place was proposed by former Mayor Regina Overton about three years ago for a site near Main and State Streets in downtown New Albany. It's to include an \$8 million YMCA and a municipal swimming complex also expected to cost about \$8 million.

The Caesars Foundation of Floyd County has committed \$1 million a year to the development over 20 years and already has given New Albany the first \$1 million to buy property and take other, initial steps.

It also has given the YMCA of Southern Indiana \$2 million toward the \$8 million cost of its planned building in Scribner Place. The remaining \$17 million, paid over the next 17 years, will cover most of the costs of a \$13.8 million bond issue.

The city and county funds will make up the difference.

Ten residents spoke to the council last night about Scribner Place, with the speakers evenly split on the \$20 million development.

"I'm not against downtown development," said Maurice King, who identified himself as a 60-year-old lifelong city resident. "I think the Y coming downtown is a good idea. But I don't think a lot of older people and people downtown can afford" to take part in YMCA activities.

He also urged the City Council to wait until it knows if county government will participate before voting on the Scribner Place funding.

City resident Jim Munford, however, urged the council to support the Scriber Place financing.

He said he's heard several financing plans for the complex, and there may be other ideas out there.

"We need Scribner Place" to help revitalize downtown, he added, urging the council to act.

Council members Dan Coffey and Steve Price said the city can't afford the long term-investment in Scribner Place.

"The whole structure of New Albany is going down the tubes," Price said, referring to roads, sidewalks and sewers that are in disrepair.

But Councilman Jack Messer said the city must invest in Scribner Place to help solve its problems.

"Sometimes you have to spend money to make money," he said.

Council members Larry Kochert, Beverly Crump, Donnie Blevins, Mark Seabrook, Jeff Gahan and Messer voted in favor of the Scribner Place resolution.

Coffey and Price voted against it, and Bill Schmidt abstained.

