

New Albany may build Scribner Place on its own

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New Albany will make plans to finance Scribner Place on its own if Floyd County government continues to balk at participating in the downtown project, city officials said yesterday.

The County Council has scheduled a public hearing Aug. 9 to learn what the public thinks about its possible construction needs.

Those include helping with Scribner Place -- but also construction of a new county government annex and perhaps a larger jail.

New Albany Mayor James Garner said yesterday that he wants to move forward with Scribner Place, a \$20 million development near the corner of Main and State streets, even without a county commitment to help.

"Every month we wait," Garner said, "it's costing the project \$150,000" in higher construction and financing expenses.

He said he still believes that the development, which is to include a YMCA and an indoor swimming complex, is crucial for New Albany's future.

Garner said he may ask the City Council next week to amend the resolution it enacted July 7 committing the city to help finance the project but requiring the county to pay half.

Under that plan, the city and county each would pay an estimated \$200,000 annually for 17 years to finance the project.

"We want to keep it moving," Garner said.

Jeff Gahan, president of the City Council, said he believes a majority of the nine-member panel will support financing for Scribner Place even if the city has to go it alone. But city officials would appreciate any help county government can provide, Gahan said

"I think it's important the city move forward," he said.

John Reisert, president of the Floyd County Board of Commissioners, said he still hopes county government will help finance Scribner Place. But he said he doubts the county will provide the \$200,000 a year the city requested.

And he said he doesn't know when county government will be able to make such a commitment, since it's unclear what costs the county may face for a new jail -- costs he hopes the city will help shoulder.

Scribner Place was proposed three years ago by former Mayor Regina Overton. Supporters hope the new YMCA and swimming complex will help attract millions of dollars in private investment to New Albany's sleepy downtown.

Overton asked county government to help finance the development, but her requests were rejected. County officials said they'd had no input in planning for the project and resented city efforts to force them to contribute.

Under Garner's administration, Scribner Place plans have been scaled back, and land acquisition and demolition of several buildings at the site have been completed.

Garner said he hopes construction of the YMCA and swimming complex can be under way by the end of the year. But the City Council must soon approve plans for an estimated \$13.8 million bond issue to keep to that schedule, he said.

And some members of the council do have reservations.

Councilman Larry Kochert said he won't support financing plans for Scribner Place unless the county agrees to pay half the cost, because he believes the development will benefit the entire community.

"I want to wait and see the final picture" before voting on financing plans for Scribner Place, Kochert said. The final picture must include county participation, he said.

Councilman Dan Coffey said that, without a commitment by the county, the project's future "is up in the air."

"We can't afford it," Coffey said, because New Albany needs more money for such basics as street, sidewalk and sewer repairs.

Dana Fendley, a member of the Floyd County Council, said she hopes county government will provide \$100,000 a year to help finance Scribner Place. But county officials were rankled by the City Council's resolution July 7 requiring county participation, Fendley said.

A resolution submitted by the city Tuesday angered county officials even more, Fendley said, because it said county government wouldn't rescind or reduce the economic development income tax rate while the Scribner Place bonds are being paid off.

She said she and her colleagues in county government resent city officials writing legislation for the county.

She thinks an effort by city officials to explain the proposed resolution would help, Fendley said, perhaps in a joint meeting of the city and county councils.

"I think the next move is up to the City Council," Fendley said.

Garner said that the resolution submitted Tuesday to county officials was written by the city's bond consultants. The language that angered county officials is what the bond consultants believe is required if the county is to help with the Scribner Place financing, Garner said.

He plans to discuss the situation further with members of the City Council and county officials, Garner said. He said he would help organize a joint meeting of the city and county councils if that would help.