

## GUEST COLUMN

# Mitch Henck: Judge Doyle Square Project needs \$11 million more

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It's shocking.

Madison Mayor Paul Soglin wants the City Council to spend an additional \$11 million on the first phase of the Judge Doyle Square Project – even though we were promised there would be no major subsidy.

The \$11 million would come from parking utility reserves. That means the money cannot be used for something else. The mayor hopes the \$11 million will be covered with parking fees, rents from commercial space and lease payments to the city for the land.

But \$575,000 of those lease payments come 10 months after phase two of the project, which includes a hotel, is finished. And that could be four years away.

I know you must be stunned that construction costs are higher than the City Council was told. But wait: When the council heard the pitch from project advocate George Austin in July 2016, council members asked only one question and voted unanimously in favor of the project. They spent about 11 minutes congratulating themselves, which is one minute for each million of the \$11 million in additional expense.

The City Council is expected to vote on the \$11 million tonight.

The city already paid Beitler, the private developer for Judge Doyle Square, \$1.5 million for coordinating the architecture of the public garage -- even though the city agreed to pay the actual architect \$2.9 million for the work. Gee, why don't we just pay twice for the same thing.

"If you look at the language of the agreement, the developer is getting paid for what architects normally do, and that is bogus," says John Jacobs, a local engineer who is critical of the higher spending.

Phase one of Judge Doyle Square includes building five layers of public underground parking with space above for commercial use behind the Madison Municipal Building. Apartments, a bike center, retail and two above-ground parking levels would go there.

Later, phase two of the project would include some underground and above-ground parking at the current Government East Ramp, with more apartments and a hotel above it.

I don't think the \$11 million in extra expense is worth it. Most of that expense could be saved, and above-ground parking on the two blocks would be unnecessary, if the city instead took the advice of legendary Downtown architect Kenton Peters.

When asked, Peters said the city should eliminate two layers of underground parking in the current hole in the ground by filling in about 20 feet of dirt. That would reduce the number of underground levels to three. The 144 above-ground spaces would go down there instead. That leaves room for 216 more spaces underground.

Offering his own plan into the mix, Peters last week said the other 200 spaces could be moved to his long-proposed 550 space ramp above John Nolen Drive. Peters said an elevated section of Law Park could go above the ramp.

The park would cost \$9 million, according to Peters. He said that money could come from real estate impact fees assessed to developers. His ramp would cost \$12 million, which he said could be covered by long-term private financing that would be paid back by collecting parking stall fees at commercial rates.

If the city would go with Peters' plan for the park and parking, the cost to the taxpayers would be zero.

Peters said eliminating the two levels of above-ground parking in phase one would save \$4 million. The elimination of two underground parking levels would save an additional \$7 million.

The City Council should take more time to consider ways to save money and eliminate above-ground parking at this prominent Downtown site.

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