

# Regional News



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# Parking rate increase alternatives presented

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Several alternatives to increasing parking rates and parking fines has been proposed for the City of Lake Geneva.

Members of the Lake Geneva City Council approved a parking rate, Nov. 28, that includes \$2 an hour parking Monday through Thursday and increasing the parking rate from \$2 an hour to \$4 an hour Friday, Saturday and Sunday for 2023 to help offset a projected \$1.8 million budget deficit.

The parking rate was approved by a 5-4 vote. City aldermen ended the vote in a 4-4 tie, but Mayor Charlene Klein casted the tie-breaking “yes” vote.

Lake Geneva’s parking rate previously was \$2 an hour daily. The city’s paid parking period runs from Feb. 1 through Nov. 14.

The council members also approved to increase the city’s parking fine from \$20 to \$50.

Several Downtown business owners and residents have expressed concern about the \$4 an hour weekend parking rate stating that it could cause less people to visit Lake Geneva.

Since November, a parking committee has been established to discuss and present alternatives to increasing the weekend parking rate and to develop long-term parking solutions for the City of Lake Geneva.

The committee consists of two city staff members, two aldermen, two representatives from the Lake Geneva Business Improvement District and two residents.

Parking Operations Manger Seth Elder highlighted six options that the committee members have come up with during a special city council meeting, Jan. 19.

## Alternatives to increasing parking rates and parking fines

One option that has been proposed is implementing year-round paid parking.



DENNIS HINES, REGIONAL NEWS

Several alternatives have been presented to increasing parking to \$4 an hour during the weekends and increasing parking fines in Lake Geneva

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DENNIS HINES, REGIONAL NEWS

Municipal Judge Henry Sibbing presents ideas for the former Hillmoor Golf Course property during a “community engagement” meeting, Jan. 17. Sibbing proposed that an area of the property be restored into a nine-hole golf course.

# Ideas presented for Hillmoor

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Nature trails, walking paths, arboretum, year-round winter activity area, children’s museum, city park, events center, new site for the Geneva Lakes Family YMCA and restored golf course— are some of the ideas that have been presented for the former

Hillmoor Golf Course property.

Lake Geneva officials recently purchased the former Hillmoor Golf Course property, 333 E. Main St., from Chicago-based White River Holdings, LLC for about \$6 million and are now trying to determine what to do with the property.

Members of the city council

recently approved a resolution declaring that the 200-acre property will be used for “public and recreational” purposes.

City officials held “community engagement” sessions Jan. 15 and Jan. 17 to give residents an opportunity to present ideas for the property.

Several residents proposed

nature-related uses for the property, while others proposed recreational uses or a combination of both.

Municipal Judge Henry Sibbing proposed that a portion of the property be restored into a nine-hole golf course.

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# New director gets settled

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Alexandria Binanti is settling into her new position.

Binanti recently was named the full-time executive director for the Lake Geneva Business Improvement District.

Members of the Business Improvement District Board approved Binanti’s contract in closed session, Dec. 27, and she began her new job Jan. 2.

As executive director for the Business Improvement District, Binanti will be responsible for helping to oversee the operations of the organization and marketing its events and activities.

She previously worked as the marketing and events manager for Visit Lake Geneva and the executive director for Downtown Kenosha, Inc.

Binanti discussed her first couple of weeks on the job and her goals as executive director during the Business Improvement District Board meeting, Jan. 11.

She said she spent the first couple of weeks meeting with some of the Business Improvement District Board members discussing the processes of the organization and the events that it hosts including Wine Walk and Oktoberfest.

“I’m just trying to wrap my

Please see **DIRECTOR**, Page A2

# Business Improvement District considers expansion

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Representatives from the Lake Geneva Business Improvement District are considering expanding the organization’s boundaries.

Members of the Lake Geneva Business Improvement District

Board discussed the issue during their Jan. 11 meeting. Board members previously discussed the issue in early 2022.

The Business Improvement District is a tax-supported business organization which was established in 1991 to help the beautiful Downtown area. The

organization hosts several events throughout the year including Wine Walk, Maxwell Street Days, Oktoberfest and Christmas tree lighting ceremony.

People who own property within the Business Improvement District’s boundaries, which are mostly located in the

Downtown area, help fund the district through property taxes.

Spyro Condos said expanding the district’s boundaries would provide more revenue for the organization, which would be used for events and beautifying more

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## Parking

From A1

Elder said establishing year-round paid parking would generate about \$150,000 a year for Lake Geneva. He said Lake Geneva had year-round paid parking in the past, but it costed the city too much money to enforce paid parking during the winter months.

“Now I think we can agree that we are busier as a community during those off-season months because of things like Winterfest, the ice castle and all the wonderful shopping and decorations that go on in the Downtown area,” Elder said. “It would generate revenue.”

Elder said there would be some staff costs for enforcing year-round paid parking.

Another option that has been proposed is implementing paid parking zones in the Maple Park Historic District, which is could generate about \$400,000 a year for the city.

Elder said residents would have all-day free parking in the historic district with their parking pass.

“We would treat it as a residential parking zone just like we do at ‘Lot I’ by the YMCA,” Elder said. “You can park there all day with a residents sticker. This would be the same concept.”

Elder said it would cost about \$25,000 to implement paid parking in the Maple Park Historic District to install parking signs and kiosks.

“There would be some capital costs to do this,” Elder said. “We would need signage. We would probably want a couple of additional paid kiosks.”

Elder also proposed establishing paid parking in Veterans Park, which could generate about \$200,000 a year. He said residents would be able to park in that area for free with their parking pass.

He said it would cost the city about \$25,000 to install parking signs and kiosks in Veterans Park.

A fourth option includes charging

residents \$10 for parking passes, which last for two years. Residents currently do not pay for their parking passes.

Establishing a \$10 fee for parking passes would generate about \$50,000 a year for Lake Geneva. Elder said about 500 passes are purchased every two years.

“It would be a workload for the front desk staff, but they can manage it,” he said.

Another option that has been presented includes making “Parking Lot D” located by the Geneva Lake Museum, 255 Mill St., into a paid parking lot and constructing additional paid parking areas behind the museum.

Converting “Parking Lot D” into a paid parking area would generate about \$200,000 a year, but constructing the additional paid parking lots would cost about \$2.3 million.

“It’s real expensive, but it might solve a bunch of problems,” Elder said.

A final option includes increasing the paid parking hours from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. to 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., which could allow the city to gain an additional \$115,000 a year in revenue.

“It’s the busiest at 11 a.m. and noon, and it starts low and it creeps up and then it goes back down,” Elder said. “If you charge that extra hour on the front end and that extra hour on the back end, you would make a little more money.”

Elder said implementing all six options could generate about a \$1 million for the City of Lake Geneva, but there would still be about a \$753,000 shortfall in the city’s budget.

He said it would cost the city about \$2.36 million in capital expenses to implement all six options.

Alderman Ken Howell said the city needs to consider the capital costs as well as the revenue projections when considering alternatives to parking rate and parking fine increases.

“The capital costs are not something we can snap our fingers at and have all the work done,” Howell said. “We’re talking over a number

of years.”

### Highway 50 reconstruction project needs to be consider

Elder said besides Lake Geneva’s budget shortfall, city officials need to consider the Highway 50/Main Street reconstruction project that the Wisconsin Department of Transportation plans to conduct in 2025.

He said not only will the project affect Downtown businesses, but the city will lose about 26 paid parking stalls on Main Street as a result of the reconstruction project.

“It looks when they do that Highway 50 work, we’re going to permanently lose 24 to 26 parking stalls on Main Street because of crosswalks and setbacks and things of that nature,” Elder said. “It’s stationary stuff that they’re going to catch us up on when the state does that highway.”

Alderwoman Shari Straube read a statement from Klein indicating that the city needs to develop revenue sources to help offset the budget deficit and to overcome revenue losses from the Highway 50 reconstruction project.

“We have to reserve for the future for 2025,” Klein’s statement said. “Route 50 will be totally reconstructed all the way through Downtown. We have the potential of losing all of Main Street for two years.”

Alderwoman Cindy Yager, who is a member of the parking committee, proposed that the city hold off on the \$4 an hour weekend parking rate until April to give the committee members more time to develop and present more detailed solutions for overcoming the budget shortfall.

“In the short time we had to meet, it was almost impossible to come up with a full plan to address the short term and the long term,” Yager said. “We did our best to try to mainly focus on the short term but a lot of that does affect long-term planning.”

Spyro Condos, president of the Lake Geneva Business Improve-

ment District Board and member of the parking committee, also requested that the committee members be given more time to present more detailed alternatives to the \$4 an hour weekend parking rate.

“So give us a couple of months to make a formal presentation and hopefully we don’t need \$4 an hour parking,” Condos said. “We will be able to make it up.”

Alderwoman Mary Jo Fesenmaier proposed that the city council discuss and vote on giving the parking committee more time to present more detailed alternatives to the parking rate increase during their Jan. 23 meeting.

“I think it’s worth the council discussing how to give them more time to present other solutions,” Fesenmaier said.

Klein said the purpose of the Jan. 19 meeting was for discussion only and to not vote on any items or motions.

“This was never meant to be an action item,” Klein said. “It was only for discussion.”

### Residents and business representatives express concerns

Several residents and business representatives expressed concerns about the \$4 an hour weekend parking rate and some of the options that were presented during the Jan. 19 meeting.

Roger Wolff, Downtown business owner and board member for Inspired Coffee, said the \$4 an hour parking rate will negatively affect Downtown businesses. He said customers of Inspired Coffee, which employs people with disabilities, will have to pay the increased parking rate and the cost to purchase coffee when they visit the business.

“This is going to affect us in real time and it will be a difficulty not only with Highway 50 closing but when someone comes in and has to pay \$8 for a \$4 cup of coffee,” Wolff said. “I think it’s going to alter the amount of revenue we get.”

R. Jay Morgan of Kilwins Lake Geneva said he is concerned that increasing the parking rate will cause people to shop in other local communities that do not charge for parking.

“It will be detrimental to the businesses, which in turn will be detrimental to the community,” Morgan said. “People come to Lake Geneva for the lake, but they also come for these businesses and for what we have as a community collectively. Why would they keep coming to Lake Geneva if every other year we increase parking?”

Kimberly Dawson, co-owner of Thumbs Up Saloon, said she is concerned that increasing the parking rate will cause employees of Downtown businesses to park further from their place of work to find free parking.

She said that could cause a safety issue for employees who work at Downtown businesses that are open until 2 a.m. or later.

“There needs to be something built into this process that allows for employee parking,” Dawson said. “You can’t take a huge chunk of their money and ask them to park miles away at 2:30 a.m. There needs to be something to consider the employees who work down there.”

Ken Etten, president of the Lake Geneva Historic Preservation Commission, said he is concerned about the proposal to implement paid parking in the Maple Park Historic District.

He said many visitors, Downtown workers and teachers at Central-Denison Elementary School park in that area because it currently has free parking and is near the Downtown area.

“It would impose an undo hardship. Resident of the Maple Park District would now have to pay for family and friends to park on a public street in front of their own home,” Etten said. “It would also impose a hardship on Downtown workers and school teachers who are able to park for free at Maple Park and walk Downtown or to the school.”

## Director

From A1

head around the operations,” she said.

Binanti said one of her goals is to keep better records of board meeting agendas and minutes to help keep track of what has been discussed about upcoming events and at subcommittee meetings.

“As we know, some of the transition into my position has come with some hiccups without having a lot of those supporting documents,” Binanti said.

Spyro Condos, president of the Business Improvement District Board, said the board meeting minutes will be posted on the Business Improvement District’s website, [www.streetsoflakegeneva.com](http://www.streetsoflakegeneva.com), in the future.

“The minutes will all be online when they’re suppose to be put online,” Condos said.

Binanti said she also plans to develop a policy and procedures handbook for Business Improvement District employees and board members within the next couple of months.

“It’s basically my goal moving

forward that we’re going to have a playbook, so that if anything were to happen to me, if we need additional support in the future, this will be accessible and will allow for a very smooth transition process moving forward,” she said.

Binanti said she also has met with board member Alethea Salgado about updating the Business Improvement District’s website, event scheduling and marketing initiatives.

She also has developed a draft code of conduct statement for board members, business retention evaluations, conflict of interest policy and conflict and compliance resolution.

Binanti said she has met with representatives from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation regarding Lake Geneva participating in the Connect Communities and Main Street programs.

“The applications are reviewed and accepted in April,” Binanti said. “However, I’ve already started the process.”

The Connect Communities and Main Street programs allow municipalities to participate in educational workshops, group



DENNIS HINES, REGIONAL NEWS

Alexandria Binanti is settling into her new position as executive director for the Lake Geneva Business Improvement District.

discussions, conferences, webinars and networking events about improving Downtown areas and commercial districts.

Communities are required to have an organization that addresses Downtown or commercial district issues in order to participate in the programs.

“It kind of gives us an inventory

of what works and what doesn’t work,” Binanti said.

Condos welcomed Binanti as executive director for the Business Improvement District during the Jan. 11 meeting. He said Binanti’s past experience will help her be an effective executive director for the organization.

“We’re very pleased to have

you. You have a lot of knowledge to bring to this board,” Condos told Binanti. “I know you’ve had some good training working with Visit Lake Geneva, and hopefully we can keep the great working relationship with them. It can’t get any better if you worked there and now you’re here. You know everybody, and I think it will work out pretty good.”

During the meeting, Deanna Goodwin, vice president of marketing, communications and development for Visit Lake Geneva, announced that John Trione has been hired as Visit Lake Geneva’s marketing and events manager.

Trione was set to start his new position Jan. 23. He previously served as the Winterfest director for Visit Lake Geneva as a contracted position.

“We’re bringing him on full time to take on the position of marketing and events manager,” Goodwin said. “So he will basically manage our social media pages and those events day to day and the strategies behind that. He will manage our co-op programs as well as our signature events from Winterfest, Restaurant Week, Concerts in the Park and Christmas parade.”

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