

Battle brews over use of city funds

By DAN YOUNG

A battle seems to be brewing over how the city will use its redevelopment funds.

City Manager John Radin is pushing hard for a project that includes the relocation of the Post Office from Union Street, across from the Plaza, to the 200 block of Main Street, across from City Hall.

The plan, which in August was approved by the City Council, calls for the city to buy the entire west side of the 200 block of Main Street, level the existing buildings, and sell a little over half of the block to the U.S. Postal Service.

The other half would be sold to commercial developers.

The city would lose about \$3 million in the process, Radin told members of the City Council-appointed Redevelopment Advisory Committee Wednesday morning, the deficit to be covered by redevelopment funds.

That, however, would leave precious little in the redevelopment coffers for other projects — such as the proposed semi-mall for Main Street from Lake Avenue to Riverside Drive.

Several members of the committee — a 17-member panel made up of mostly downtown businessmen and property

owners — aired concerns Wednesday about Radin's plans, and the committee eventually decided to look into options for the development of the 200 block after it was suggested by Mark Frederickson, committee chairman, that Radin's plan amounted to "subsidizing" the relocation of the Post Office.

It is apparent, however, that the committee is less concerned about subsidizing the Post Office than it is about the city using downtown redevelopment funds to do so.

The committee certainly has made no secret of the fact that it would like to see redevelopment funds used for the semi-mall project — and there simply isn't enough money to pay for both.

The battle lines are drawn.

Any decision on the financing of projects is ultimately the responsibility of the council, of course, and any battle over how to spend redevelopment funds will by its very nature include appears likely to come down to a struggle to determine who has more influence with the council — the committee or the city manager.

Radin, in presenting his plan to the council last year, said the cost — unknown at that

time — to the city for the 200 block project would be beneficial in the long run.

The development of the run-down 200 block will induce the revitalization of surrounding areas, he says.

The only way to get that sort of domino-effect development started is to get a large business or an agency such as the Post Office to locate there, Radin said yesterday, adding that no major commercial developer has stepped forward.

And, Radin said, the only way not to lose money on the 200 block — no matter what goes in there — is to forget the project altogether. That, in turn, might very well ruin any chances of upgrading the lower Main Street area, he said.

Frederickson and members of his committee, however, see the semi-mall project — also approved by the council — as the base for downtown redevelopment.

The project would include not only the semi-mall, but the upgrading of peripheral streets.

Without the redevelopment funds, however, it appears the downtown property owners would be saddled with paying for most of any downtown beau-

tification project — through an assessment district.

That naturally wouldn't please downtown property owners.

Radin says that he is looking at "the overall impact on the city" when he pushes his project.

Members of the advisory committee say they don't want all the redevelopment funds — tax money — put into one block.

The question is, obviously, which idea is the best inducement for quicker redevelopment?

The council will have to come up with an answer.