

NEW: State Street garage plans move on

By [Jessie Van Berkel](#)

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The city is moving ahead on the long-awaited State Street Garage, with officials considering a proposal to sandwich about 400 public parking spots between a ground floor of retail space and upper levels that include condos and a hotel.

City staff recently selected developer Jebco Ventures' 10-story plan for the property near the downtown core. That plan includes:

- Nearly 18,000 square feet of retail space on the bottom floor.
- Four levels of public parking and one level of private parking.
- A 100-room hotel, possibly the Hampton Inn and Suites.
- About 30 condos in the \$250,000 price range.

City commissioners will have the final say on the proposal next week. It was one of six plans Sarasota received for the mixed-use project.

If commissioners reject the idea it would further delay work on the project that already faces a tight deadline. The city has an agreement with Pineapple Square retailers to finish the garage at the corner of Lemon Avenue and State Street by February 2015.

The project would at least be under construction by then, Purchasing Manager Mary Tucker said. A city attorney is working with an attorney for the merchants on contract timeline issues, she said.

"They're willing, I think, to look at the plans," Chief Planner Steve Stancel told the Community Redevelopment Agency Advisory Board Thursday afternoon. "There hasn't been any agreement yet."

He said staff anticipates the project will be completed around July 2015.

Some board members remained unconvinced that the timeline was realistic.

"I look at your schedule now and I'm mystified," board member Michael Beaumier said. "I think we might be a little aggressive."

But the board unanimously recommended that the city accept the site plan and select Jebco as the developer.

The process to build the garage stalled last spring when Citizens for Sunshine, an open government advocacy group, sued the city. The city staff had changed the rankings of companies that applied for the design-and-build contract outside by phone, instead of at a public meeting. The city later held a meeting to correct the situation and the suit was settled in April.

A.D. Morgan, the company that received the highest ranking, would be working with the city and Jebco Ventures on the project design.

The city would pay for the four floors of public parking, and Jebco for the private

enterprises — the condos, hotel, private parking and retail units.

The parking project is anticipated to cost the city \$7.3 million, which includes construction and aspects such as parking management, Stancel said. The City Commission will also be asked to approve another \$15,000 for improvements to the sidewalk along North State Street.

Jebco would pay for construction for the floors with the hotel and condos and buy the ground floor from the city for about \$1.9 million.

During public meetings about the project, some people raised concerns about having a 10-story building.

“I think the idea was to maximize the benefits of the site’s location,” said Ian Black, the real estate broker who found the developers willing to buy the space. He said the project will be in keeping with the architectural integrity of the area.

But the architectural plans are not complete. Stancel said staff anticipates 45 percent of the building’s design will be ready for the City Commission to review by February.

At Thursday’s advisory board meeting, Sarasota residents and State Street Eating House owner Kirk Voelker spoke in favor of the garage, which will replace a 139 space parking lot at the site.

“We’re ecstatic about the new design of State Street,” said Voelker, who said he was representing other retailers. “These merchants support this project and are excited to see it happen.”

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