

Decorah group discusses market building

By Sarah Strandberg , News correspondent

DECORAH — The timing is right for pursuing a permanent structure for the Winneshiek Farmers Market in Decorah, according to members of a building committee who say it could serve several community purposes.

The group met with the Decorah City Council's property committee on Monday to discuss the status of the project they previously had presented to the council.

Members of the Farmers Market Association would like to build the structure on city property. Then, the group would give the structure to the city and lease it back for use as a market, according to committee member Erik Sessions of Decorah.

"It would be easiest for the city to own it, then the city can lease it out for multiuse," he said.

The building could be used during Nordic Fest, serve as a trail head for the new Trout Run Recreational Trail or could be rented for family reunions or weddings, said Meredith Joy and Becky Steines, both of Decorah and members of the building committee.

Sessions said the preferred location is the city's 48-hour parking lot where the market has been located the past several years.

Another possibility is the parking lot north of the Oneota Community Co-op.

The association hopes to begin raising money before the start of the next market season in May.

Despite the nation's dire economic situation, there are viable grant opportunities available, Steines said.

The building committee believes the cost ranges from \$200,000 to \$700,000, but members hope they can lower the cost by using low-cost or nocost recycled material.

Sessions said the local business community, including the Downtown Decorah Betterment Association, has been supportive and that the Farmers Market is working closely with the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative, which is seeking to persuade residents to eat healthy, locally grown food purchased in their neighborhoods.

Mark Webber of Wild Rose Timberworks of Decorah is assisting the Farmers Market with initial construction plans.

Jerry Aulwes, chair of the council's property committee, said he believes the city would be interested in leasing the space for a permanent Farmers Market, but stopped short of saying it would want to own the structure.

City Clerk Wanda Hemesath said City Attorney Rick Zahasky has advised the city against becoming involved in a fundraising effort or serving as a fiscal agent for the group.

Steines said when permanent farmers market facilities are built, the trend around the country has been they eventually expand.

“After they have a structure, they become a destination,” she explained.

Winneshiek Farmers Market sales have increased every year since it started in 1984, Steines added.

The committee envisions making the Farmers Market aesthetically pleasing, with landscaping and a parklike setting, making it desirable to various groups.

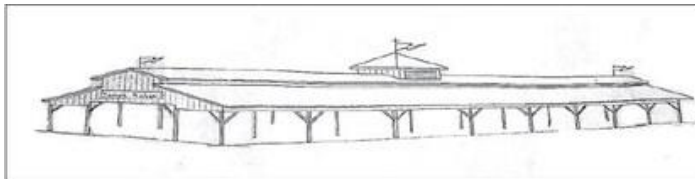
Park-Rec Director Rick Edwards said it might be helpful to have rough drawings made for both city sites.

“It’s extra work, but it may help the council come to a decision where it should be — then you can start dealing with issues such as underground utilities, etc.,” he said.

Sessions said he would see that plans be drawn for two structures — each with space for 15 vendors — for the 48hour parking lot site, and one with room for 30 vendors at the co-op parking lot site.

Edwards, who is heavily involved in the Food and Fitness Initiative, noted millions of dollars are spent on food in the Decorah area, but only 1 percent is grown in Winneshiek County.

“Having that figure grow to even 3 to 4 percent would mean a huge amount of money is not going to leave the area,” he said.



Wild Rose Timberworks : A group is urging the Decorah City Council to pursue a permanent structure for the Winneshiek Farmers’ Market. Mark Webber of Wild Rose Timberworks of Decorah sketched out a possible design.