

NEWS

Kent plans policy change for selling surplus property

by [STEVE HUNTER](#), Kent Reporter Courts, Government Reporter
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Policy changes are coming to Kent City Hall after the Pine Tree Park sale fiasco.

Under a proposed ordinance, city staff and the City Council will need to follow strict procedures about public notices and public hearings whenever it looks to sell surplus property.

The council is scheduled to vote Tuesday, May 17 to adopt an ordinance that lists the procedures. The council's Operations Committee approved a draft ordinance on May 3 with a 3-0 vote.

"We kind of learn as we go," Council President Bill Boyce said at the council's Operations Committee meeting on May 3. "I think this is a first step of us trying to make sure we don't repeat the same mistakes again. We all have learned from the Pine Tree incident. This is a good first step. We have learned what we can do better next time around and we will be much smarter the next time."

The council sold Pine Tree Park to a housing developer in September without public notice. Residents later found out about the sale when the city posted notice about the proposed development. Residents successfully fought to save the neighborhood park. The council in April reversed itself and stopped the sale, costing the city about \$800,000 to settle up with the developer for ending the sale agreement.

If the council adopts the new policy, the following steps must be taken to consider selling surplus property:

- Hold at least one public meeting to receive public comment
- Post notice at the property 15 days prior to the public meeting
- Post a public notice about the meeting in the local newspaper
- Mail notice about the meeting to property owners within 300 feet of the site
- Post notice on the city website

City officials didn't take any of those steps prior to selling Pine Tree Park. City Attorney Tom Brubaker and his staff came up with the proposed ordinance at the direction of council following the Pine Tree Park sale termination.

"We tried to put together a fair, objective process that will provide notice that we all wished we had provided for Pine Tree Park," said Brubaker, who added easements and small strip properties are exempt from the policy.

Councilwoman Dana Ralph likes the proposed ordinance.

"This is one of those lessons learned that came out of our Pine Tree park discussions," Councilwoman Dana Ralph said. "We all accepted and have taken responsibility for things that happened through this process and as a result we are moving forward with some policies that ensure we have a very open process when it comes to surplus properties."

The policy focuses on keeping residents informed.

"I'm very pleased with how it came out," Ralph said. "It's timely and necessary and not anything that we all are not committed to, but this will solidify it in writing."

The new ordinance would exempt the city's sale of the Riverbend par 3 golf course because the city had numerous public meetings about that property before the council voted to sell it. The city has several developers interested in buying the par 3 property.

"I think that seems really reasonable," Ralph said. "We have been through that process and have moved on to the next step. But it's important to note it is exempt for that reason."

Derek Matheson, city chief administrative officer, said he expects the new policy to first kick in as the city moves forward with selling its Naden Avenue properties, which are east of Highway 167, north of Willis Street and south of West Meeker Street.

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