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Council to keep watchful eye, but not own, Vermilion Iron

Mayor Bill Crusinberry said Hoopeston will not take ownership of Vermilion Iron.

The announcement came at a special meeting Tuesday, where the first action was to go into closed session for 32 minutes to discuss the issue.

Following the executive session, Crusinberry said there would be no action taken but that "the consensus is the council will not take ownership."

At an August 6 meeting, representatives from city and county groups urged the council to take ownership of the property to have control of demolishing structures and remediation of possible contamination at the former foundry.

Crusinberry did not poll council members in open session to establish a consensus but said officials will monitor results of Vermilion County Health Department's soil sampling. He added that the Illinois Attorney General and Environmental Protection Agency representatives advised there are violations against the previous owner.

The property is expected to be included in a tax deed sale August 19 in Danville. Hoopeston will execute an order of demolition, forcing anyone who buys the property to submit a plan to the city on how the new owner will clean up the property. The order "will keep someone from taking all the steel out and make a bigger mess than we've got now," Crusinberry said.

If soil samples show contamination, the health department can apply for an EPA brownfields grant to clean it up. The site can qualify for the grant even if the city does not own the property, said Alderman Brandon Hamilton.

The council also discussed abandoned and dilapidated property in the city. Alderman Randy Carter talked about the decline of the city, including the loss of 800 residents between the 2000 and 2010 censuses and the lack of suitable housing for doctors, nurses and other professionals coming to Hoopeston.

Carter suggested at the August 6 meeting that the city impose a .005 increase in the sales tax, with half to go for residential and half to commercial properties.

The discussion prompted Alderman Bill Goodwine to comment that Illinois has one of the highest gas taxes in the country. "Do you know how we got there," he asked. "Two cents at a time."

Dustin Tarter, of the University of Illinois, who said he is working on the downtown, was disappointed that the city did not take over Vermilion Iron and that there was disagreement with the sales tax. "I'm interested in doing things in this town but it's hard for me to do them when I can see no return on my investment," he said.

In other business, Alderman Carl Ankenbrand's announcement that the swimming pool would close for the season on Wednesday brought questions from resident Darlene Medler, who uses the pool almost daily during adult swim hours. "I'm concerned the pool is closing earlier and earlier and earlier," Medler said. "I can't tell you how much the pool means to me."

Medler said pool manager Ashley Danner told her that high school aged life guards are willing to work for an adult swim from 5-6 p.m. "If it's possible to leave it open - and I think it is - I think it should be considered," she said.

Ankenbrand said if finance committee chairman Bill Goodwine would allow the extra expense of keeping the pool open, Ankenbrand would speak to Danner about someone working as a lifeguard for an adults only swim time.

In unrelated business, the council heard from Sunny Singh, manager of the new Hoopeston Marathon (formerly Convenient), who would like to add hard

See COUNCIL on other side

Tomato Contest
 Bring in your tomatoes Friday morning, August 23rd. Show all day Saturday, pick up Sunday after 2 p.m.
 You can bring in anything from the garden but only Tomatoes will be judged.
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