

City to interview firms on new ramp, city hall

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2-16-84

Members of the Rapid City Common Council will interview architects and engineers for the proposed new city hall and downtown parking ramp next week.

And the public will be invited, though that wasn't the original plan.

Nine local firms have expressed interest in being considered to design either the parking ramp, city hall or both. Council members, Mayor Art LaCroix and city staff will begin interviewing representatives of the firms at 1 p.m. next Wednesday. Interviews are expected to take about four hours.

Dunham Associates and Thomas & Associates have expressed an interest in the parking ramp only. Hengel-Latimer Associates Inc. and Lund Associates Inc. are bidding for the city hall only. The other companies, Banner Associates Inc., TSP, McKay-McConnell Partnership, Bell Galyardt & Associates Inc. and Lee Geiger & Associates, have all submitted proposals for both projects.

Councilwoman Alyce McKay has excused herself from the selection process, because her husband, L. Michael McKay, is a partner in McKay-McConnell.

The City Hall Steering Committee met with LaCroix and Public Works Director Leonard Swanson Tuesday to discuss interview times and procedures. Swanson said then that the interviews would be closed to the public because they dealt with personnel matters.

Wednesday morning, City Attorney Ray Woodsend said he "probably

wouldn't disagree" with Swanson that the meetings involved personnel and legally could be closed. And, he said, the interviews wouldn't be an official meeting of the Common Council, so the state's open meeting law would not technically require it to be open to the public.

Later Wednesday morning, though, LaCroix said the interviews would be open.

"I don't think there's any problem with the public attending," the mayor said. "The interviews will be conducted individually. If the public or the media want to sit there, that's up to them."

Interviews of this kind have been closed in the past, LaCroix said, mostly because people haven't asked to attend.

A potential problem with opening the meetings is fairness to the architects, Woodsend and LaCroix said.

"We don't want one architect sitting through the presentation of the other," Woodsend said. "We don't want somebody feeding information to the other people coming in. It's difficult to handle. We feel it's important to do these things fairly."

LaCroix added, "We will try to make it as fair as possible for each one. I think we can set down guidelines at beginning, and people will abide by them."

After the interviews, the council's city hall and parking ramp steering committees will meet separately to discuss the presentations.

"After they do this interview, they will have to evaluate what they've heard and make their recommendation," LaCroix said.

Merchants plan