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## Local & State

### Street use sparks disagreement

City Council will hear ways to fix problems around Commercial area

By MIKE RAMSEY

of the Journal Star

**PEORIA** — Some consider it a street. Others call it an alleyway.

Whatever Commercial Street is, recent developments along the 400 and 500 blocks of the circa-1850 thoroughfare have caused headaches for a variety of parties, including developer Kert Huber, who is renovating the former Foster Building at Water and Harrison streets.

Huber ran afoul of alleyway neighbor Dennis Parr when he encroached on the public Commercial Street by placing his project's electronic transformer there.

Meanwhile, in another dispute, businessman George Murray is angry the city has closed Commercial at the Robert H. Michel Bridge to build a riverfront parking lot. The blockade has caused inconveniences for truck traffic at Murray's nearby MRS Industrial warehouse, 512 SW Washington St.

Tonight, the city administration will propose solutions to the City Council, which previously has deferred the issues.

To aid the redeveloping Foster Building, 401 Water, Public Works Director Steve Van Winkle suggests vacating 10 feet on either side of Commercial between Harrison Street and the bridge. This would allow encroachments on either side of the alley and preserve 22 feet for motor traffic after sidewalks and curbing are added.

Huber supports the idea, and, reportedly, so does Les Cohen, executive vice president of Cohen Development, 406 SW Washington St.

But Parr, who owns property at 412 Washington St., complains the city is wrongly trying to reduce the size of Commercial Street — currently 50 feet wide — which is the most convenient ingress for his business. Commercial Street runs parallel to Water Street and is located between Water Street and Washington Street.

"I don't want it transferred into an alley," Parr said. "I'd like it to remain a street, so we can make it nice back there."

Huber said he and Cohen have agreed to improve their respective sides of the alley, if the council approves the plan.

Possibly the bigger conflict involving Commercial Street lies with Murray, who says he was surprised by the city's recent closure of the alley at the Michel Bridge, where a public parking lot is being constructed.

Trucks that dock at the

rear of his MRS Industrial warehouse come in from Walnut Street but no longer can drive through to Harrison Street via Commercial.

Murray recently hired at-large Councilman Gary Sandberg, an architect, to design an L-shaped passageway that would route trucks from Walnut to Washington.

Van Winkle, who estimates the plan's cost at \$34,000, instead suggests the city convey the existing alleyway to Murray and other property owners south of Michel Bridge so that they can plan for their own private improvements. He notes that trucks still have at least one-way access to MRS Industrial via Walnut Street, though they must do back-up maneuvers.

"Have we made it less convenient? Yes," Van Winkle said of Murray's complaints. "But as far as loss of access, I don't see any correlation. That's my point of view."

In a higher-profile vote tonight, the City Council is poised to vote on \$5.4 million in city assistance for a proposed downtown ballpark to be used by the Peoria Chiefs and Bradley University's baseball program. A group of investors, as yet publicly unidentified, would finance the \$16 million stadium but say they need financial concessions from the city.

The council meets at 6:15 p.m. at City Hall.