CRYSTAL FALLS—The Crystal Falls City Council endorsed a proposal for development of a retail business within city limits at its June 11 monthly meeting.

Tim O'non, representing a Midwest property developer, was introduced by West Statewide Realty's owner Ken West, who told the council his client was looking for property in Crystal Falls to construct a 9,100 square foot building with about 30 parking spaces.

The property suited for the business, O'non explained, was located between U.S. 2 and Court Street, and Sixth and Seventh streets—directly north of the Courthouse.

He said purchase agreements were in place with two properties, and the developer was negotiating an agreement on the county property, which includes the old carriage house, now used as cold storage for the sheriff's department.

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The business, which was not named, was a national retailer, O'non said, with about 60 locations in Michigan. He estimated the business does about $1 million in sales a year, and planned to employ 10 full- and part-time jobs. The property is zoned for business, he added.

"We're hoping the city will endorse the project," West said.

City Manager Dorothea Olson said it was a viable project, but the one problem is that the sheriff's department uses the old carriage house. O'non said the developer was willing to build a storage building to replace it. There is also an issue of access to the jail on Court Street.

Olson said—this was just a suggestion, she added—that the city abandon Court Street. The new business won't need it, and the county could have it for access.

Olson and the council thought it might be possible to erect a storage building on the pad of the former water tank, which had just been taken down. It would provide about 3,000 square feet of space.

"I think the city needs to encourage businesses to come in," Olson said. The council approved an endorsement of the project.

The city also took action on two agenda items designated to help businessman Charles Steele come closer to opening his restaurant on Fifth Street.

The council approved a request for a special use permit allowing off street parking on Michigan Avenue, pending approval of the Zoning Board, creating six parking spaces.

The council also approved transferring a liquor license formerly held by the Pub to Steele's business.

Crystal Falls Electric Department Foreman Dave Graff made a presentation to the council updating it on the smart meters installed throughout the city.

The project is completed, he said, using community development block grant funding.

What originally began as a project to replace meters with automatic meter reading units was changed to the advanced meter infrastructure, adding features and value to the project, with capability for communication between the meter and the utility.

Additionally, the utility customer can get energy use information on a regular basis; the system includes the capability to connect and disconnect remotely, and the department has the ability to address peak demand and adjust for energy needs.

There is also the capability to add the water utility to the metering system, Graff explained.

The total cost of the project was $576,000; the city's match came to $31,395, some of which was provided by WPPI.

The city's water project is complete, Olson reported. The old water tank has been dismantled, and the filter building demolition is under way.

The council approved reinstating a crossing guard at Maple Avenue and U.S. 2 for the upcoming school year.

Olson felt, after looking briefly at the city's audit, that one could be budgeted. The cost would be approximately $3,000 a year.

The council set a June 1, 2013, date for abandonment of the water line serving customers on Rock Crusher Road.

The project is slated to coincide with power plant maintenance, involving a drawdown for dam maintenance, which has been postponed from this August until next year.