

## ***Herald News***

*May 4, 2010*

*By Bob Okon*

**Joliet--** The city will put \$70,000 into a deal for a new downtown campus for Joliet Junior College.

The Joliet City Council on Monday voted 5-0 for the arrangement with three members abstaining because of conflicts of interest.

One councilman, Joseph Shetina, said later that he abstained because he actually appraised the old White Store for JJC. He set a value at \$70,000 below what the city and college will jointly pay for the property.

The deal has the city buying the property at \$550,000 and then immediately selling it to JJC for \$480,000. Shetina's appraisal was the higher of the two obtained by JJC.

But, Joliet, with home rule powers, can pay more than appraised value. And, the seller, which is the Turk family that owns Turk Furniture, refused to sell for less than \$550,000, JJC officials said.

JJC attorney David Ruttle said the Turk family had an offer to buy the building for more.

City and JJC officials described it as a "win-win" deal because the expanded campus would bring 300 to 400 additional students to downtown, Joliet.

"This is a good step in bringing people back down here," Councilman Thomas Giarrante said.

## **USF deal, budget woes**

The city in October 2008 put \$540,000 into a Rialto Square Theatre deal that bought a University of St. Francis arts program downtown. That money was committed a few months before the city announced drastic budget problems, started hiking taxes and fees and began cutting back jobs.

Joliet currently plans to lay off 63 city employees by the end of the month unless their union approves contract concessions. A hike in downtown parking rates and fines goes into effect next week.

Joliet City Manager Thomas Thanas said the \$70,000 for the White Store will come out of contingency funds. Thanas also said the \$70,000 may buy the city the right-of-way to extend Webster Street, which now ends at the JJC downtown campus. The city could extend Webster from Ottawa Street to Chicago Street.

But, that depends on what design JJC chooses for its downtown campus. The area also might be used as a plaza instead of extending Webster.

Other council members who abstained from the vote were Anthony Uremovic, a full time JJC employee, and Jan Quillman, whose husband works part-time as a JJC instructor.

JJC officials previously had said the White Store, which dates back to the 1800s and is one of the oldest buildings in Joliet, could be renovated or demolished.

But, Monday, Ruttle said, "It's no secret. The White Store is coming down."