

WADENA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS SPECIAL BOARD MEETING
MAY 7, 2008/9:00 A.M.

A Special Meeting of the Wadena County Commissioners was held on Wednesday, May 7, 2008 at 9:00 a.m. in the Board of Commissioner Room, 415 Jefferson St. S., Wadena, MN 56482. Chairman Orville Meyer called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. and the pledge of allegiance to the flag was said.

Present were Commissioners William Stearns, Lane Waldahl, Dave Schermerhorn, and Mary Harrison. Also present was Consultant Mike Gibson and Auditor/Treasurer Char West.

Chairman Meyer stated that discussion would focus on capital improvements and repair of the Courthouse and other County buildings; what can be done now, later, can we do anything. He requested each Commissioner comment on what they felt was the most immediate need.

Commissioner Waldahl responded that he felt the immediate need was repairs on the Courthouse itself such as the air conditioning/heating system and to work with the Building Services Director. He added that the Law Library should then be moved.

Commissioner Harrison stated that she would rather make a list and set priorities. She added that in agreement with Commissioner Waldahl, immediate Courthouse repairs need to be completed first.

Mr. Gibson commented that if the HVAC needed to be replaced then the Board needed to do long range planning in the event that the Building would be added on in the future. He added that the major concern of the Department Heads now was lack of space. Mr. Gibson stated that he had visited with the County Attorney who stated that her storage files are currently in the Courthouse, by statute they need to be under her control and she was currently crowded. Mr. Gibson added that in the Sheriff 's Department a two-stall Sally Port was added in 1987 which had been cut down to a one-stall Sally Port with one-half used for files that must be kept indefinitely as well as an evidence room where each officer stores their evidence which had to be kept under lock and key. He pointed out that there was storage in hallways and the ramifications were not known as far as fire safety. Mr. Gibson stated that it was a good decision not to build a Justice Center but there still are issues. He added that in reviewing the Architect's report there were several options; remodeling the Wensman Building for the Courthouse offices or adding on to the Courthouse on a green space. Mr. Gibson pointed out that with the information provided by the architects the Board could either decide to fix what was currently in place or do long range planning on how much space would be needed in the future. He pointed out IT, for example, could use another 800 – 1,000 sq. feet.

Commissioner Harrison stated that looking into the future, as funds were not available at

this time, it would make sense to remodel the Wensman Building, as it was cheaper per sq. ft. She added that if the current Courthouse was added on to it would have to match the current structure and it was already pointed out in studies that the design did not work well in this climate. Commissioner Harrison continued that she felt the immediate priority was to fix the roof and HVAC in the Courthouse.

Commissioner Stearns stated that things needed to be phased in; the Law Library may not be a top priority and that he was not convinced the best option was to eliminate the small Courtroom for the Law Library as ITV and other Court changes would be occurring in the near future. He added that the Wensman Building had a superior underground structure and that he would rather move offices into the Wensman Building, such as Veterans, Extension and a multi-purpose room. Commissioner Stearns continued with the suggestion to move the Law Library to the Extension Office, use the Veterans Services area for storage for the County Attorney and have a night meeting room in the Wensman Building for anyone that wanted to meet at night. He added that from a security standpoint; the Sheriff did not want anyone meeting in the Courthouse at night. Commissioner Stearns pointed out that some offices could move that don't need immediate adjacencies and that the Veterans Service Office would be closer to Social Services and the Workforce Center.

Commissioner Schermerhorn commented that he agreed with everything said, but if offices needed to be moved he did not want to spend a lot of dollars on the Wensman Building as the Board needed to watch how the citizen's dollars were spent.

Chairman Meyer stated that his vision was about the same; however he foresaw a change in the Court System. He pointed out that five or six years earlier the State Court System discussed expansion but now there was a new plan in the State; there was going to be a whole new system of how the Court System would be handled.

Commissioner Stearns commented that the State had already cut 200 employees and planned on cutting another 200 employees.

Chairman Meyer stated that he felt uncomfortable with the Court system and agreed that there would be teleconferencing as well as the State passing a law allowing Court Districts to overlap jurisdictions.

The Board further discussed the fact that Courts were already using ITV and discussion was being held on combining Court Administrator Offices when Court Administrators retire.

Commissioner Harrison commented that the only reason the Board was looking at the Wensman Building now was due to the fact that it was pertinent to how the HVAC was repaired in the Courthouse.

Mr. Gibson informed the Board that he had contacted architect Tony Stoll to inquire whether it would be better to remodel the Wensman Building or cheaper to build from the ground up. He stated that Mr. Stoll had informed him that it would be better to work with the Wensman Building than starting new. Mr. Gibson added that everyone was very sensitive to the cost and what it would cost the voters. He added that it was critical to have communication with the citizens and include and seek their advice; if the public was well informed, the voters will understand. Mr. Gibson continued by pointing out that IT did not have to be in the Courthouse and that, without spending dollars, firms would come in to provide options for wireless. He added that it may be more beneficial to pretend how to build a new Courthouse and once you have that idea in mind, then take that idea and consider how that idea can fit into this building.

Commissioner Stearns commented that one of the reasons IT was left out in terms of a move right now to the Wensman Building was that it did have immediate adjacencies and it would be expensive. He added that the MIS Director indicated a need for a secure, hardened-off room and that IT would be moved in Phase II.

Mr. Gibson reminded the Board that MIS was vulnerable due to the equipment overhead as well as a leaky roof in the women's restroom. He pointed out that it was lucky the leak was not over about 15 feet.

Mr. Gibson stated that if someone had strong concerns why not to do either option it needed to go on the table for everyone to consider and defend their stand.

Chairman Meyer commented that a third option may be the purchase of houses to the west of the Courthouse.

Mr. Gibson stated that this was a long range option if the Board decided to stay on this ground; additional parking would be needed as well as a larger generator. He pointed out that the current generator did not serve the building to the degree that it should and now stand alone generators were used.

Commissioner Stearns commented that the Wensman Building there was sufficient parking and we are short 29 parking spaces at this facility. He added that buying houses for parking was expensive.

Commissioner Schermerhorn commented that maybe MIS needed to be moved as well as a meeting room to the Wensman Building in order to provide the Sheriff's Department space for safety as safety needed to be the number one concern.

Commissioner Harrison stated that she agreed with Commissioner Schermerhorn's idea of needing to move some offices out, it needed to be done in stages and the parking was already at the Wensman Building. She added that she would like to defend the green space as there was so little of it.

Chairman Meyer questioned Commissioner Waldahl as to how important it was for Corrections to be close to Court as this was not the situation in Todd County.

Commissioner Waldahl stated that it was a convenience and probably a necessary. He added that in talking with the Community Corrections Director the Corrections Department would like to move over to the Courthouse in Todd County and they were delaying the search of a building due to this need. Commissioner Waldahl added that he felt it would be best to have all of the County offices in one building; Social Services and Public Health, but that could not be done. He express the need to take care of this building first and then work our way out.

Chairman Meyer stated that previously a Citizen's Committee, that would include several Commissioners, was mentioned.

Mr. Gibson commented that it would be a real strength to go out into the community; let the public know why things need to be done; communication was critical. He added that prior to bringing in the public the Board needed to have some sense of the options to consider.

Commissioner Harrison suggested that each Commissioner have a town hall meeting in their districts.

Commissioner Stearns said he would like Mr. Gibson to meet with the Building Services Director to discuss the HVAC that may be easily repaired.

Commissioner Harrison stated that Johnson Controls would come in for nothing and look at the current system with suggestions on improvements.

Mr. Gibson will contact Johnson Controls.

Board recessed at 10:10 a.m.

Board reconvened at 10:25 a.m.

The Board requested Ms. Porter, Verndale Sun Reporter, to list options on an easel.

- Repair Leak in upstairs Courthouse Women's Restroom
- HVAC - Mr. Gibson will contact Johnson Controls and report back
- Fire Escape-currently replacing steps for \$1,000 or less.
- Door lock/ID System/Time Clock
- Window caulking
- Sidewalk around Courthouse

Board discussion was held regarding the need to establish a Committee to consider options.

Commissioner Stearns stated he felt Architect Tony Stoll needed to be included in one of the first Committee meetings to explain his information.

Mr. Gibson suggested one option would be to share the Master Plan with the Committee and then consider the need to spend additional funds on an architect.

Ms. Porter reminded the Board of the Energy Report information she had presented to the Board several months ago. She pointed out that MPCA would conduct an energy audit for free.

Mr. Gibson stated that he would contact MPCA to obtain more information on an energy audit. He added that the Committee would not make all of the decisions but their input was needed.

Commissioner Stearns stated that he would like to have the Committee evaluate moving some of the office from the Courthouse that did not have immediate adjacencies.

Commissioners Waldahl stated that the Committee needed to be given all options.

Commissioner Harrison stated that she would like to sit down with Mr. Gibson to develop a list of options that had been discussed; first list "here are the problems" and second "here are the options".

Chairman Meyer commented that the Board needed to keep in mind how often Wadena County has a murder trial and that we can provide security when needed.

The Board was in agreement that Commissioner Harrison and Mr. Gibson would draw up perimeters for a Committee and the Board would appoint two representatives from each Commissioner's district.

Mr. Gibson stated that once the information was received the Board could discuss the scheduling of another Board Meeting to review.

Chairman Meyer adjourned the Special Board Meeting at 11:07 a.m.

Charleen West, Auditor/Treasurer

Orville Meyer, Chairman