

WADENA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS SPECIAL MEETING
JULY 22, 2008, 9:00 A.M.

The Wadena County Board of Commissioners Special Master Plan Working Meeting was held on Tuesday, July 22, 2008, at the Wadena County Courthouse in the Commissioners Room at 415 Jefferson St. S., Wadena Minnesota. The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Chairman Orville Meyer and the pledge of allegiance to the flag was said.

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

Motion by Waldahl, seconded by Schermerhorn, to approve the day's agenda as presented, motion carried.

Mr. Gibson reported that he had received calls from a few people who were unhappy because it was decided to set up a Committee Meeting for the Master Plan and then it was decided not to meet. He added that the plan was to set up a Committee of one to two representatives from each District to review all of the Master Plan work that had been done by the Architects. Mr. Gibson stated that he had explained to the callers that it was the Board's concern that it may appear that the Board was not willing to do their duty and take action; they did not want to leave that impression and he also explained how difficult it may be to define the perimeters of what that Committee was to do. He pointed out that he had given the Press from three newspapers tours of this building.

Mr. Gibson stated that he did receive suggestions on the dilemma as far as what space we might have available. He added that he sensed that the people understood the issue we have with Law Enforcement and their crowded space and the need for more room. Mr. Gibson stated that one suggestion was to look at the Highway Department and that he had spoken with Joel Ullring, Highway Engineer, about the space that would be available. He pointed out that a natural could be to move Planning and Zoning to that location, however, there were people in this building that need to communicate with that Department and felt he needed to find out if that communication could be done by phone or computer.

Mr. Gibson stated that another suggestion previously discussed was the use of the lower floor of the Courthouse for Law Enforcement. He added that he would want to talk to Dave Anderson, Veterans Service Officer, regarding the possibility of relocating his office.

Mr. Gibson stated that he had talked with Lee Brekke, Assessor, who stated that it was convenient to be in this Building, but they could function away from this Building. He added that a question that came in from the general public was "Could the space being leased to the State in the Work Force Building, be used". Mr. Gibson pointed out that that space was leased until the end of 2009; currently we receive \$36,538 for this space in 2008 and will receive \$37,630 for 2009, however, Ms. West pointed out that utilities come out of those figures.

Mr. Gibson pointed out the following options:

- Do nothing
- Do the immediate things such as HVAC
- Another concern was whether there were any OSHA or fire marshal issues that need to be address very soon
- The security issue would be better if Law Enforcement were to go all on the lower level
- Adding onto the Courthouse was a possibility
- Wensman Building space

Commissioner Meyer asked for an interpretation from Rin Porter, Verndale Sun, following the tour.

Ms. Porter related the following concerns:

- Safety issues in the office of Tom Speed, Jail Administrator, were a real concern; any violent person being brought in at an arms length from Mr. Speed or the arresting officer, plus there was all of the equipment in the room at risk.
- There was no place for physical activities for the prisoners, which in most States was a requirement.
- Mike Carr, Sheriff, and Jean Birch, Administrative Assistant, and the Investigators were in an unsecured area which was open to the public. Visitors have to be allowed into this area for visitation with the inmates.
- Evidence storage and STS lockers have taken up space in the Sally Port.

Ms. Porter commented the situation was inadequate at best; this provided all sorts of opportunities for lawsuits, injuries, mistakes, insurance risks, that could affect the County's risk position insurance-wise as well as danger to the staff.

Ms. Porter further noted the following:

- The office of Kevin Stensrude, MIS Director was the worse; there was noise and no room.
- Judge Robertson was very concerned about prisoners brought up public steps for Court
- Mentally ill prisoners have to remain within the County, as no other place would take them, and they come up the front stairs that we all use.

Ms. Porter commented it looked like an accident waiting to happen and there were a lot of serious issues.

Sara Hacking, Wadena Pioneer Journal, stated that since she was covering this meeting she felt the need to decline her view.

Mr. Gibson commented that he will make himself available for additional tours.

Mr. Gibson stated that it was suggested that Planning and Zoning could possible be at the Highway Department and a spot could be found for the Veterans Office. He added that the

Extension Office did not have a lot business that needed to be done in the Courthouse and possibly a Fair Grounds Building could be used for the Office, which could possibly open that area up for IT. Mr. Gibson pointed out that Kevin Stensrude, MIS Director, stated he did not have to be in this building as the equipment could remain in the Courthouse and the office staff could be located outside the building.

Chairman Meyer stated that the immediate need seems to be with Law Enforcement.

Mr. Gibson reiterated that those issues needed to be resolved first.

Chairman Meyer questioned Commissioner Waldahl on how important was it to have Community Corrections located in the lower level.

Commissioner Waldahl responded that it should either be on the lower level or near the Court on the main floor and added that in Todd County they had to walk two blocks. He added that first the Board needed to look what at what the State had done to the counties and how the 3.9% levy limits would affect Wadena County. Commissioner Waldahl pointed out that we need to tighten our belts and fix what need's we have here, which would be Law Enforcement. He stated that we have other buildings that have space we can use right now; we need to look at the Workforce Center. Commissioner Waldahl pointed out that the negotiation of the Workforce Lease Agreement with CEP was for a two year contract because of space needs and we might have to tell the State they will have to look somewhere else because the space could be used by the County. He added that we might have to build at the Wensman Building, but we need to wait until we can do it without raising taxes or the levy; I'm not promising anything, but I don't want to see the citizens affected anymore than they are now. Commissioner Waldahl stated that first we need to maintain the buildings we have and then plan on the future, if we have to build on to the Wensman Building, then do it in phases.

Commissioner Harrison stated that we are in agreement that we can't build right now, but we have to plan. She stated that with the Work Force lease running to the end of 2009, can the jail problems wait until the end of 2009; I don't think they can so we have to look at the problems right now.

Commissioner Schermerhorn stated that we may want to look now at rearranging who was in the lower level; even if we give the Sheriff's Department one more chunk of area to use for their biggest immediate needs, I think we need to utilize the space we have to give to them without out adding on or moving away so they can work in safety.

Commissioner Stearns stated his position remained the same as was in the past which was that Veterans, Extension and a Meeting Room should be moved to the Wensman Building; however, there would be a need to build a bathroom. He added that the architect advised we are short 29 parking spaces at this facility and this move would free up enough space in this building for the time being. Commissioner Stearns pointed out that we could use Sentenced to Serve; we own the building and have over \$270,000 in it already and by using STS plus funds already in the budget we would have about \$125,000 in our building fund. He pointed out that the Veterans

Service Officer stated that the closer he was to Social Services and the Work Force Center the better it was for his Department; he also suggested possibly moving MIS as the area was compatible for fiber optics. He added that the adjacencies for Zoning and Planning were with the Auditor and with the Assessor and they were back and forth often. Commissioner Stearns concluded by stating that the Architect pointed out that the Wensman Building was the cheapest option.

Commissioner Harrison noted that the fiber optic line had to be re-laid in two years when the city would be putting in all new conduit; we will have to wait to move MIS until that time if that was decided upon to do so.

Chairman Meyer mentioned that we cannot count on the MCIT refund; that could be gone tomorrow.

Mr. Gibson stated that we need to hold off on HVAC until we get a recommendation from the company.

Commissioner Waldahl stated again that the cheapest way would be if we use the space at the Workforce Center and the Highway Department.

Char West, Auditor/Treasurer, reminded the Board that in the Workforce Lease Agreement the County reserved the right to terminate the lease with a 6-month notice.

Commissioner Meyer stated that first we have to concentrate on the HVAC whether anyone moves or not and secondly we have to get down to specifics as to who moves where and where to open up space for Law Enforcement.

Commissioner Schermerhorn questioned as to what was closest to Law Enforcement that could be moved, that they feel would be the best in order to give the Sheriff's Department more space in the same general part of the Courthouse they were in.

Chairman Meyer commented that Community Corrections was located the closest to the Sheriff's Department.

Commissioner Stearns stated that if we move Veterans, Extension and a Meeting Room to the Wensman Building, then there would be security in the Courthouse by not needing to hold meetings in the Auditorium at night. He added that by getting Zoning out of the back hallway and up where Extension was located, that space would be available to the Sheriff's Office.

Commissioner Waldahl questioned why Zoning couldn't be moved to the Highway Department.

Commissioner Stearns agreed Zoning could move to the Highway Department, however, he was not sure of what kind of work needed to be done with other offices.

Mr. Gibson will talk with Mr. Stensrude regarding electronics.

Commissioner Stearns suggested Cody Yglesias, Building Services Department, make a material list of what it would cost to remodel the southeast corner of the Wensman Building.

Commissioner Harrison stated she agreed with Commissioner Stearns for a long term plan, but not now. She stated that we should consider and talk about fixing the Courthouse HVAC and deal with the Law Enforcement space. She questioned whether there would be room for Veterans, Corrections, the Assessor and Extension at the Work Force Center if we could terminate the Work Force lease and use that space a little more quickly rather than wait for another one and one-half years. Commissioner Harrison pointed out that if that were possible we could move Zoning to Highway and MIS could move to where the Extension Office was now.

Commissioner Waldahl stated that if Mr. Gibson was going to do some checking on space maybe he could check on the square footage that was needed here and what was available at both the Work Force and the Highway Department.

Ms. West suggested if Assessors could be one of the offices going to the Work Force Center, could Corrections just move down to that smaller area.

Chairman Meyer commented by giving the Sheriff's Department the west end of the basement it would cut out the back entry problem to the Court Rooms.

Commissioner Waldahl commented then the Dispatch area and the Booking area should be remodeled, also the area of visitation to the prisoners.

Mr. Gibson questioned whether it was possible to concentrate on making the lower floor available to Law Enforcement which would include County Attorney, Corrections and Homeland Security.

Chairman Meyer commented that a negative with Law Enforcement in the basement would be that we loose the Auditorium but we have found there are a lot of other meeting places available. He questioned why the County was providing Wadena Township with a meeting place.

Commissioner Waldahl commented that he had previously been on the Wadena Township Board and was unsure how and when the Courthouse became the Township's Meeting location.

Commissioner Harrison commented that the Meeting Room at Social Services was bigger than the current Board Meeting Room.

Commissioner Stearns commented that historically the Auditor would be located in the Courthouse, but as in Ottertail it was now more common to have a Government Service Center. He added that a long range plan could be for everyone not involved in crime be relocated and he would like to know the cost of this option.

Commissioner Meyer stated that a County with a population of 14,000 could not afford to make this a Law Enforcement Building.

The Board recessed at 10:00 a.m.

The Board reconvened at 10:17 a.m.

Mr. Gibson stated that the Board has discussed many options that morning but he would like to inform the Board that he had not discussed these options with any of the Department Heads due to the time restraints but that he will do this so they are aware of the discussions.

Ms. West added that Craig Nathan of MNCEP at the Workforce Center was also not aware of the discussion.

Commissioner Stearns commented that if all options were being reviewed, there was space at the Transfer Station but unsure of the quality of the space, which maybe should be looked at.

Chairman Meyers asked the guests in the audience to give their reactions to the County's space issues.

Dan Summers stated that he felt the first thing to figure out would be how many square feet was needed.

Ralph Miller stated that he thinks back at the time when this Courthouse was originally planned in the late 60's and it was put in the center of the block for a purpose of being the pillar of the community but it wasn't long and it was added onto the south end. He added that long term, the area behind the Courthouse could be utilized as the building was no longer centered on the block as it was originally planned for the beauty aspects. Mr. Miller stated that in regards to the space that existed in this building and the possibility of moving the Auditor/Treasurer out, his opinion was that anything that had to do with County Government concerns should remain in this building. He added that if you start taking out the Auditor/Treasurer then we no longer have a complete County Government Building. Mr. Miller pointed out that anything the auditorium was used for could be held in a place like the Wensman Building which would provide space for Law Enforcement; there was no reason this meeting could not be held elsewhere. He added that the people he talked to seemed to think the original intent for the County Courthouse, you might have to go back 50 years to find out what that was, doesn't have anything to do with Extension or several other offices as it didn't have anything to do with County Government.

Rodney Bounds stated that he concurred with Mr. Miller on a lot of things and he felt everything should stay in the Courthouse that was pertinent to the County, but he personally did not care for the Wensman Building. He added that he felts we have a county garage with a lot of room and beautiful office space at no expense. Mr. Bounds pointed out that in future year's maybe we should build to the north of the Courthouse. He stated that the Courthouse was not an old building and we have to keep it up. He concluded that he can not see going to the Wensman

Building and if he would get on the Board he would not be in favor of rebuilding the Wensman Building.

Jim Hofer stated that he had not been in the Wensman Building so he did not know what kind of space it was. He added that his background and experience pertained to new regulations, heating and ventilation, in the schools and that he has had to go through a several million dollar renovation and he knew what the Board was facing right now. Mr. Hofer pointed out that things change and a few years ago the County did not have GIS or a Homeland Security Office; new things that happen cause structure changes. He stated that with his limited knowledge he would be looking at all of the County facilities and it sounded like there was a need right now to do something; long range, who knows what would be out there in 10 years or so.

Chairman Meyer stated that the next step would be to prioritize and it appeared that heating and ventilation and law enforcement was top priority. He added that with Law Enforcement being a top priority we have to make room for them and prioritize who we should seriously look at in moving out of the building.

Commissioner Waldahl recommended Planning and Zoning to the Highway Department and then look at the Workforce Center for the Veterans Service Office and the Extension Office. He added that he agreed that the square footage requirements need to be researched by Mr. Gibson.

Discussion was held regarding what the audience was hearing from citizens regarding adding on to the Courthouse to the north.

Commissioner Stearns pointed out that the County had hired two Architectural firms to conduct space studies of what square footage each office needed. He added that he felt they should discuss with the Zoning/Parks/Solid Waste Director to see what she feels her adjacency needs were. Commissioner Stearns pointed out that he did not feel the taxpayers would agree to a \$2 to \$3 million dollar bond issue to add onto this building to the north and then the building would have to be brought up to code. He concluded that he would be willing to immediately move from the Board Room to the Social Services Meeting Room.

Mr. Gibson stated that a lot of options had been discussed and he would like to have the opportunity to discuss this with the Department Heads.

Commissioner Harrison stated that the Board knows that space would be needed and since we have a six month lead on cancelling the Workforce lease we should seriously consider going ahead and doing such. She added that everything that was done in all County buildings were government services and some of them were visible to the people on the street. Commissioner Harrison pointed out that the idea that these services should stay here in this building was an emotional desire rather than a financial desire. She added that what she was hearing from her people at the north end of the county was that we need to keep costs down instead of making this a symbolic center.

Chairman Meyers requested the Workforce Lease Agreement be put on the next Board Meeting

Agenda for discussion and possible action.

Commissioner Stearns requested that Paul Sailer, Social Services Director, and Craig Nathan, MNCEP representative, be part of the meeting discussion.

Mr. Gibson stated that if the Board decided the Workforce Center space was needed by the County would they consider offering the Wensman Building space to MNCEP if they wanted to remodel it.

Commissioner Stearns stated that another space would need to be found for MNCEP in order for them to stay in Wadena.

Mr. Gibson stated that he will obtain information regarding the HVAC, talk with Mr. Sailer, talk to the Building Maintenance Department regarding a cost estimate for materials to remodel the Wensman Building, check on how much Department space was available at the Highway Department, and he will talk to all of the Department Heads. He added that he would report to the Board during the July 24, 2008 Board Meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 11:50 a.m.

Charleen West, Auditor/Treasurer

Orville Meyer, Chairman