

WMU COMMISSION/WILLMAR CITY COUNCIL JOINT MEETING
SUBJECT: FACILITIES DISCUSSION
Kandiyohi Co. Health & Human Service Building
Tuesday, May 8, 2018 - 4:00 PM

Present: City - Mayor Marv Calvin, City Administrator Ike Holland, Bruce Peterson, Planning & Development Director, and Sarah Anderson, City Planner. WMU - General Manager John Harren, Facilities/Purchasing Supervisor Kevin Marti, and Administrative Secretary Beth Mattheisen

Municipal Utilities Commissioners: Carol Laumer, Justin Mattern, Abdirizak (Zack) Mahboub, Nate Weber, Bruce DeBlieck, and Ross Magnuson. (Absent was Brendan MacDonald.)

City Councilmembers: Kathy Schwantes, Ron Christianson, Julie Asmus, Rick Fagerlie, Fernando Alvarado, Audrey Nelsen, and Shawn Mueske. (Absent was Andrew Plowman.)

At 4:15 p.m., Mayor Calvin opened the joint meeting by greeting those in attendance and followed by presenting background information and a status update of discussions between the Utility and City regarding each entities facility needs. Mayor Calvin noted that the City has engaged an architect who has provided the City with a preliminary design option for a downtown site for the City Hall facility. Before advancing any further with the facility project, the City Council must determine whether or not their facility would best suit the needs of the community by remaining downtown or elsewhere.

The main topic of today's meeting will focus on weighing the pros and cons of the feasibility of a joint or campus-style facility between the two entities and whether this is even a viable option for consideration. When considering this option, all were reminded that the main objective is to best meet the future needs of each entity and the customers/citizens of Willmar in a financially responsible manner.

Mayor Calvin proceeded by opening discussion focusing on facility needs and spacing requirements of the two parties. Among the areas that a shared facility could possibly work would be to share meeting space, conference rooms, possible staffing, etc.

Commissioner Laumer informed the attendees that while building of a new facility has been planned and budgeted for a number years (original Facility Study was conducted in 2010), it is not the top priority of the WMU at this time (higher priority projects include: power supply, Priam Substation, Water Treatment Plant, Power Plant, etc.). While comparing similarities and differences between the two entities, Laumer feels the operational sides of each are significantly different and should remain separate.

Administrator Holland stated that preserving and keeping the downtown vibrant is a priority. It is their intent to keep the downtown area inviting for the visitors and citizens of Willmar (including the customers of Rice Hospital/Carris Health/CentraCare Health System). Holland stated that he and GM Harren have discussed this topic on numerous occasions and would like to address this issue one more time with the board members to determine if a joint facility is a viable option.

General Manager Harren stated that while there are some areas that could potentially be shared (i.e. meeting rooms), the Utility requires between 8-10 acres which would not be conducive in the downtown area. This amount of space has been determined based on efficiency and operational needs of the Utility (based on conducted facility studies). The most efficient and cost-effective facility for the Utility would consist of one facility encompassing all Utility departments and its employees.

Following opening statements, Mayor Calvin requested comments and input from the attendees. (Note: Individuals will be identified by their initials.)

AN: Has the Utility looked at other facilities?

KM: Yes, visits have been made to Austin and similar-sized utilities. Smaller communities are more likely to have a combined (city hall/utility) facility, but generally not seen in cities of comparable size to Willmar.

RC: Understandable why the Utility needs the 8-10 acres to support their operational needs. Feels that the building of a new city hall/facility should be put on the backburner. City's plate is full right now.

BD: City should remain downtown and centralized for the community. Utility needs additional storage area (i.e. trucks, poles, transformers, cold storage, etc.).

MC: We are not proposing to combine Public Works with the Utility. This would not be beneficial especially in light of a catastrophic event.

AM: Agrees that it would be best to not join the entities together since a catastrophic event would only add to the challenges. The City and Utility are two different entities/operations. Combining the two would not serve the community very well. Feels that keeping City Hall in the downtown area is needed.

JA: Is "one-stop shopping" really needed? (Questioned was the need or convenience for customers to pay their Utility bills downtown.)

MC: Having all services under one roof could have advantages.

JA: Who is it more advantageous to?

AN: Do other Cities function as one entity?

CL: Smaller communities are more likely to. Larger communities generally keep operations separate since they are so different ("stand alone").

CL: Feels that City Hall should be kept in the downtown area. Utility should find the needed space elsewhere (not downtown).

RF: Is the Utility going to be sold?

RM: The full Commission has not discussed the "rumor". Therefore, this topic should not be discussed at this time. (agreed)

RC: Service-side makes some sense if it is going to be done. City Hall does not have to remain downtown. People make the downtown vibrant, not having City Hall there.

AN: With the ever-increasing technical advancements, less people will need to actually come to the facilities.

MC: All depends on the demographic of the community. We must be aware of demographics & trends.

JA: What is the size of the old Elm Lane (Trailer Park) area? Answer: estimated at 12-14 acres

MC: City wants to move forward with the project.

NW: There is the possible sharing of some office space, but not feasible for space needs of the Utility. Feel that City Hall should remain downtown. Due to the needed space, this would not work for the Utility.

JM: Too many differences to be advantageous to combine staff. Joint facility on a cost perspective alone would be a “yes”, but it would not meet the space needs of the Utility.

FA: Share a facility, but not staff. Move forward with building a City Hall that provides a safe, quality environment. Encourages sales tax.

AN: Campus-style facilities area would be good, but not sure if a downtown site is needed.

RM: Stick with the Utility’s proposed plan. Wait another 2 yrs. (estimate). Take care of the Utility’s priority issues and continue to save money towards the future facility.

BD: Inefficiencies are identified by being separate. What were determined to be the inefficiencies of separate facility/locations (individual Utility areas including: Office, Service Center, Plant, pole yard, storage areas, etc.)?

KM: Costs were configured and data compiled in the updated 2016 Facility Study. This data reflects the estimated annual costs of the inefficiencies at over \$21,000. This amount would significantly increase if the Utility were to be located downtown with operational departments at a different site(s). If the City were to conduct a travel efficiency study, they may be surprised by the inefficiencies and costs associated with separation of departments. Costs are reduced by joining the departments together.

RC: One suggestion would be to have the ability to pay Utility bills at City Hall? This would keep the Utility presence in the downtown area.

SM: There are incompatibilities associated with joining the two entities. Utility needs 8-10 acres so locating in the downtown area does not work. It appears that the Council feels that the City Hall should remain in the downtown area.

KS: Agrees with SM; City Hall should remain downtown; campus-style facility does not work with downtown. Rice Hospital and Utility are two completely different entities.

AN: Not committed to downtown site; creating efficiencies would be positive; keeping a downtown presence would be good; entities are separate industries but sharing space (facility) could work; and, waiting for 2 yrs. to proceed with the City Hall project would work.

RC: What would happen to the current Utility building/area?

KM: Possible future scenario was presented. Noting that there is a vast amount of infrastructure located in the Utility’s area (i.e. gas lines, wastewater mains, transmission lines, fiber, etc.) which greatly hampers the ability to build on the current site. Also, access for company vehicles (i.e. Line Dept. trucks) is nearly impossible due to the proximity to Highway 12. The total current Utility-owned area would be approx. 6 acres (this includes the acquired lots near the office).

SA: Utility and City needs are different.

RM: Hard to decide if the City has not established where they plan to locate their city hall.

MC: In conclusion, the two entities walk separate paths. Would forming a subcommittee (i.e. 3 MUC & 3 Councilmembers) to further investigate be beneficial?

AN: Not totally comfortable with a decision right now (combining or not combining the two entities).

JA: Should be two separate entities (due to the vast differences).

KS: Should be two separate entities.

JA: We've already had this discussion and determined it is not viable.

RC: Downtown does not have the area required for a joint facility to work. If City Hall remains downtown (which doesn't have to), simply keep a collection site at City Hall for utility payments.

SM: City Council needs to decide where it will be; this will present direction.

KS: Tallying the responses, the most constant throughout the discussion is to keep City Hall downtown; Utility would remain separate.

SA: City Planning Commission has discussed this issues, and the downtown area was the recommended choice (City Hall site).

MC: In conclusion, the City and Utility will continue on a parallel path, but not a combined path keeping the two entities separate. Public input is vital for a successful path for all.

JH: Expressed his appreciation for the open discussion and input provided by all. It appears that the City Hall is best suited to remain in the downtown area. Due to the size of area needed by the Utility, the Utility does not feel it would be appropriate to use prime property (downtown) which could be used for numerous business and community ventures. There are definitely some positives in a campus-style facility area. The City must determine what their needs are to effectively determine a site which would be best for the City and its citizens. As for the Utility customers, they generally drive to our current office, so this does not require the Utility office to be located in the downtown area.

KM: Looking for the best of both worlds, adequate space to meet our needs along with accessibility for our customers.

IH: City will be holding a town-hall style meeting (evening session) to request input from our community members. Following the session, the City will take into consideration the input from the citizens to assist in determining a site that is most beneficial for their new facility.

AN: Thank you to all. This topic is both interesting and challenging.

CL: Thank you all for your conversation and insight presented today. Laumer agrees that the City Hall should remain in the downtown area and that the Utility should have a separate facility not located in the downtown area (due to the additional space needs).

There being no further discussion, the joint meeting was adjourned at 5:40 pm.