

BROOKINGS COUNTY COMMISSION

SPECIAL WORK SESSION

Monday, October 5, 2009

The Brookings County Board of County Commissioners met in special session on Monday, October 5, 2009 with the following members present: Donald Larson, Alan Gregg, Mary Negstad, Deanna Santema, and Dennis Falken.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Larson called the meeting to order.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

The board discussed the co-location of City/County Administrative Facilities. Chairperson Larson asked what the board's feeling was on working with the city on finding a location that would serve the needs of both the city and county in the future.

Commissioner Santema said that the board had discussed rescinding the motion they have on the table to build in the courthouse parking lot. She said that they have gone since 2007 with this motion to build a new building and she does not want to rescind the motion to build on the parking lot no matter what comes out of the meetings tonight and tomorrow. Commissioner Larson said he never believed the intent was to rescind that motion, but instead to move forward and explore possibilities with the city.

Commissioner Falken said that it's a timing issue for him. He said the courts have been patient, but their space needs continue to get worse. He questioned what the city's intent is as far as funding and construction of a building. Would it be to jointly find a piece of land and the county does its part and the city comes in later, or are they side by side doing this together, or are they still looking several years down the road to start anything. Falken said the county needs to be in a new building very soon.

City Councilman Michael Bartley said that he understands the county's time constraints. He said that they could create a subcommittee and accomplish most of the exploration of the issue in a couple of months. Bartley said that phasing is a possibility, but that all these types of decisions would need to be made at that first meeting. He also noted that funding could possibly be a bonding issue. Falken noted that the commission has been setting aside money for years for this project and that a bond could be referred. Commissioner Larson said that if they proceed, membership from both entities working as a committee over the next couple months could have a lot of answers.

Commissioner Negstad noted that City Manager Jeff Weldon has said that he's interested in the property to the north of the current city hall for the city's future expansion and questioned Bartley why that has changed. Councilman Bartley said that is still an option of the joint facility doesn't work, but that the council voted to look at a co-location with the county.

Commissioner Gregg said that he agrees that the county's motion to build on the courthouse parking lot should not be rescinded. He would like to see a committee put together to explore the co-location possibility and he thinks that they could have a lot of answers within 3 months. Gregg said he has concerns with how potential property owners would be approached to purchase any land that may be needed. He believes that they should agree to look at a joint facility, but not rescind their motions to build so that they have something to fall back on.

Councilman Bartley says he believes they owe it to the citizens to take a serious look at co-location.

Commissioner Santema said that she's trying to figure out exactly where they're at as far as dual usage of the building. She said the only shared space would be commons areas like bathrooms, halls and meeting rooms. Santema said that the city wants to stay close to their law enforcement and the county wants the States Attorneys Office close to the courthouse. She wants to know who they're doing this for and will it be worthwhile and wonders if the general public would benefit from the facilities being together.

Commissioner Falken stated again that he is more concerned with the timeframe and that the county owns property that they plan to build on and has approximately \$5 million set aside to do that, but he doesn't know if it's enough money to purchase property and build a joint location. He said that by the first of the year, the committee should have enough information for the board to decide that this is what we want to buy, this is the purchase price, yes, no and be on our way. Falken said the county may just have to go off on its own and build its own building. He said he does not want to wait another year to do something, this has gone on and on and they need to decide on a final direction.

Commissioner Negstad said that she would like to see the county spend the money they have set aside to build a building on their own property, which she believes is being responsible to the tax payers. She would hate to spend another million to buy property and not have enough money to do what they need to do.

City Councilman Michael McClemans asked if it was an absolute that the offices in the courthouse have to be downtown or would the county consider moving the 3 or 4 main offices out to the Swiftel Center campus in the Research & Technology Center building. He said that if it's a quick "no" fine. He also wondered if the city and county do something jointly, if a law enforcement center is something that should be considered as well.

Commissioner Larson said that from a public service standpoint, he feels the county offices should remain close to the courthouse. He said a joint law enforcement center is probably in our future. Commissioner Santema agreed that the county offices need to be in close proximity to the courthouse and that's why she made the motion to build in the parking lot. She said that she is interested in looking into a joint law enforcement center, but she said that they don't have the need at this point, that the county's need is administrative space. Commissioner Falken said they've been striving to keep the offices close to the courthouse, but he would not be opposed to them being off-site.

Councilman McClemans asked which is more important, a joint administrative building or joint law enforcement center and is concerned that between the two projects, the city could end up with a decent building that's not getting used.

Commissioner Santema asked the question again that other than the common areas, what is it that makes it better to co-locate with the city than be separate and why it is so important to be together. She would rather the city stay where it's at and expand to the north and county build on its parking lot and then down the road work together on a joint law enforcement center. Commissioner Falken said that there may be some monetary savings if the right place is found and that is what's most important to him. He said that they aren't going to join offices, but there may be efficiencies in being with each other.

Commissioner Larson said that co-locating would be a service that would be provided to the citizens. He asked how many duplicate facilities they can expect the citizens to build. Larson also said that as time goes on, he believes that we're going to see a lot more interaction between city and county governments.

City Councilman John Kubal said, with regards to forming a committee, committees in the past have been put together and the different members are looking out for their own vested interests. He would like to get representation from the citizenry and use some of that talent from the city and county on this committee.

Brookings County resident Gloria Kloster said that her understanding was that this meeting was to decide whether to join or not and she encouraged the county to explore this possibility.

City Councilman Julie Whaley said that this meeting and getting citizen input should have happened a long time ago. She wants to see the county stay by the courthouse, have the city move north and the city police force move into the current city hall and do it as separate ventures.

Brookings County resident Barb Telkamp said that it was two years ago this month that the county commission voted to build a building. She said there have been previous public meetings and the commission has stopped what they were doing and looked at the 1921 Building, the former First Bank & Trust building and the Gas N' Mor location. But now they've made a decision to move forward with building a building. Telkamp said that the topic of a joint location is even a very old topic. But the county's space needs issues have been a 20 year old project and it's getting to be a little ridiculous and she's wondering if anyone makes a decision and sticks to it. She said that it may sound good to the citizens to look at joining the facilities, but it would still mean taking property off tax rolls, it would mean tearing down buildings. Telkamp said that a joint law enforcement center would be very expensive and this is not the time that taxpayers want to talk about that. She said that the county has saved up the money, probably enough to build, but probably not enough to buy property. And that another few months won't settle this and they won't have a final answer by the end of the year. Telkamp says there needs to be a deadline and they've gotten this far a few months at a time. She also said that the city is going to have to prove that they have a need for a new building too. She believes the courts could sue if this continues to go on. She ended by telling the board that they were elected to make decisions. Let's quit having committees make decisions for you. Get to work.

Commissioner Santema said that they have gone on and on and now we have the requests for proposals ready to roll and now we're going to stop again. She said that they've waited for the task force report, waited for this, waited for that. She said that this has been going on since long before she was on the commission. Santema said they need to do what's best for the county and she's not convinced they're going to make a better deal by joining the facilities. She wants to continue the process to build on the parking lot and look at a law enforcement center later on.

Commissioner Falken said that he indicated earlier that he would like to explore the possibility of a joint location, but put a deadline of December 31st on it and if there's not a purchase order in place, then the county starts their own process. He does not want to wait any longer than that. Commissioner Larson agreed that he also wants to explore looking at co-locating with the city and he publicly thanked the Administrative Task Force group and BEDC Executive Director Al Hueton for their work.

Commissioner Santema said that if the co-location venture is moving forward then the rural areas and other municipalities throughout the county need to be involved. She's voting against the joint facility, but if it passes, she said she will work as hard as she can to make the most of it.

Commissioner Negstad said she still likes the idea of building on the parking lot, that it will serve the county's purposes most efficiently and she's disappointed to be delayed another 2 to 3 months.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Chairperson Larson declared the meeting adjourned.

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