

CITY OF WAUWATOSA
MEMORIAL CIVIC CENTER
7725 WEST NORTH AVENUE
WAUWATOSA, WI 53213
Telephone: (414) 479-8917
Fax: (414) 479-8989

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
Tuesday, November 20, 2007 – 7:15 p.m.

PRESENT: Alds. Hanson, Herzog, Krill, Krol, Maher, Meaux, Minear, Purins, Stepaniak, Treis, Becker, Birschel, Didier, Donegan, Ewerdt - 15

EXCUSED: Ald. Grimm

ALSO Fire Chief Redman; Asst. City Attorney/Personnel Admin. Aldana
PRESENT: John Sabinash, Zimmerman Architectural Studios, Inc.

Ald. Becker in the Chair

Report from Zimmerman Architectural Studios, Inc., Concerning Fire Station Concepts. John Sabinash, Zimmerman Architectural Studios, Inc., explained that following many months of discussion, the Community Development Committee agreed to focus attention on the ‘greater Underwood area’ as the recommended location for a new fire station. The area is defined as the west side of Underwood Avenue between Milwaukee Avenue and Harmonie Avenue, and includes the current site. The neighborhood supports mixed uses.

Zimmerman was charged with the task of developing a minimum of two and a maximum of three alternatives for that site. Mr. Sabinash stated that the drawings being presented are conceptual only, designed to illustrate the needs of the department within the confines of the proposed locations. Costs relative to the options will be presented, and the preferred option will be identified.

The mission statement is to “*Create a timeless building that is functional, welcoming, sustainable, and of high quality.*” The intent is to build a facility that will last 75-100 years, taking into account the location of the facility within the historic Village area. The alternatives developed are:

A. Middle Alternative: Fit on the existing site. On the positive side, no acquisition of additional property is needed; some of the existing property is quite deep. There is great familiarity of operation on the site. It is well-located in relation to the Village.

On the negative side, the site is quite steep towards the south. Some maintenance activities would have to be split up to make the project fit onto the site, such that they would flank the administrative uses. Connectivity becomes an issue. Underground parking would be constructed, as there is little available surface parking. The site would be built-out to the limit allowable under the zoning district; a second floor would be required. Additionally, the entire fire station operation would have to be physically relocated during construction, possibly for up to two years.

B. North Alternative. This is a more efficient plan than the Middle Alternative as the staging is finite. There would be no disruption to fire station activities during construction. There is design flexibility. Good at-grade parking can be provided, so that structured parking can be abandoned with this plan. Topography is good, though there is a 10-foot grade change across the site. The potential exists to re-use the existing site for other activities.

On the negative side, the depth of some service bays is diminished, dictated by the depth of the property. Property acquisition is necessary. Some underground parking is necessary. Fire fighters' quarters and some administrative services would be located on the second floor.

C. South Alternative. Property acquisition of two parcels would be needed, but since commercial property is involved, may be less emotional. The South Alternative is a high profile location for a civic building. Part of the parking on Harmonie Avenue could be utilized for other civic uses.

On the negative side, topography is a problem. Structured parking may require a Harmonie Avenue access point. The configuration of the property is such that a 'pinch point' approximately 50 feet deep exists at one location which limits design ability on the site. A 'dumbbell' shaped development would result. Construction can't be staged without disrupting and relocating fire station activities. This would be a very intense use owing to the size of the parcel.

Costs. Mr. Sabinash noted that construction costs will be about the same on all sites (\$6.7 million), as will the 'soft' (furniture and equipment) costs (\$2.9 million). Property acquisition (assessed value plus 20%) would add additional costs for the North (\$1.6 million) or South Alternative (\$700,000). Underground parking would cost about \$1.3 million for the Middle or North Alternative; at-grade parking would cost about \$200,000 for the South Alternative.

With either the Middle or South Alternative, additional facilitating/enabling expenses estimated at about \$900,000 would be required, as would a \$100,000 estimated demolition premium. The Middle and South Alternatives would also shoulder a \$200,000 estimated contractor premium.

Only the North Alternative offers residual site value of approximately \$300,000, since the original site could be made available for other uses.

In summary the Middle Alternative would cost an estimated \$12.1 million; the North Alternative would cost approximately \$12.5 million (with a possible \$300,000 residual site value); the South Alternative would cost about \$11.7 million.

Mr. Sabinash recommended pursuing the North Alternative. It is the most cost effective solution overall and offers the best operational scenario; it provides the best opportunity to compress construction and control costs. The parking is rational. The Fire Department is in agreement. Once the Common Council has considered the options and decides which one should be pursued, more planning will begin.

The tax impact of this project is about \$0.17 - \$0.19 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation, or about \$41-\$46 annually per home owner.

Chief Redman echoed the Department's support for the North Alternative. It meets the long term operational service needs of the Department, and allows for continuity of those services during construction. While three of the proposed service bays lack some of the desired depth (due to the size of the property at certain points), the Department is willing to accept this shortcoming in order to preserve service ability during construction.

Discussion ensued about timing issues. It was explained that the City Clerk must certify referendum wording to Milwaukee County no later than February 19, 2008 for inclusion in the April 1, 2008 ballot. Therefore, the Common Council needs to take final action, via resolution, by February 5, 2008. Also noted was that Council action sooner – rather than later – provides more time for the City to develop a cohesive strategy for explaining to voters the need for this project.

In addressing questions of acquisition, Ms. Aldana stated that it can be a simple negotiation process resulting in the purchase of the needed properties. Alternately, a more formal statutory process involving eminent domain can be implemented if negotiations falter. At this time there is no information to indicate what acquisition difficulty, if any, the City could encounter.

Committee members expressed interest in obtaining additional information concerning:

- alternate costs to underground parking
- possible developable revenue from excess property

Chief Redman stated emphatically that Zimmerman was instructed *not* to include projected value of redeveloped excess land because several committee members had previously stated that the service needs of the fire station must drive this project, not potential excess land and its possible redevelopment.

In addressing a query about combining the current location with the south location, Mr. Sabinash replied that it is akin to the South Alternative. Relocation of fire station activities would be necessary for the duration of construction.

Comments were made about potential difficulties in acquiring residential properties, though it was acknowledged that such remarks are being made without knowing how property owners actually feel.

When asked about LEEDS certification (that the building is environmentally responsible, profitable, and a healthy place to live and work), Mr. Sabinash stated that certification was not necessarily actively being sought. However many of the elements of the project are aligned with requirements for certification.

An inquiry was made about the possibility of straightening out the existing western boundary of the 'greater Underwood' site. Mr. Sabinash replied that straightening (expanding westward) the existing western boundary would address issues of maintenance bay depths and provide assurance that the parcel is adaptable to meet departmental needs. Buffering of properties west of the 'greater Underwood' site would be similar to what exists now; it would be minimal immediately adjacent to the bays, however.

Chief Redman replied to a query about acquiring the church parking lot at the corner of Underwood and Milwaukee Avenues. While undeniably attractive because of its depth, this property is not under consideration for the fire station project because there the City would be unable to replace the parking lost to the church.

It was moved by Ald. Krol, seconded by Ald. Donegan to refer the matter to the Committee of the Whole to review the recommendations of the Fire Chief on the proposed project so that a final decision can be made by February 5, 2008 in order to accommodate the referendum schedule (for the April 1, 2008 ballot.) --

It was noted that public input should continue to be sought, as the decision to proceed will ultimately be up to the voters.

It was moved by Ald. Maher, seconded by Ald. Krill to amend the motion to send the issue to the Community Development Committee next week. --

Discussion ensued concerning involvement of the public during this phase. It was suggested that since this issue has been under discussion for over one year, many of the members of the public who are interested in this matter have likely already expressed their feelings. It was also reiterated that timely action by the Council is critical so that adequate time can be devoted before the April election to informing the public about this proposal. Weekly Committee of the Whole meetings can be scheduled, if necessary.

With the consent of the Second, Ald. Maher withdrew his amendment.

With the consent of the Mover and the Second, Ald. Krill clarified that the Committee of the Whole meeting should be scheduled for next week (November 27) immediately following regularly scheduled committee meetings, with the understanding that public input will be welcomed. -15

The meeting expired at 8:25 p.m.

Carla A. Ledesma, City Clerk

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