



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

COMMON COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
Tuesday, November 27, 2007

PRESENT: Alds. Becker, Birschel, Donegan, Didier, Ewerdt, Grimm, Hanson, Krill, Krol, Maher, Meaux,
Purins, Stepaniak, Treis -14

EXCUSED: Alds. Herzog, Minear

ALSO Mayor Estness; J. Archambo, City Admin.; A. Kesner, City Atty.; Chief D. Redman, Asst.
PRESENT: Chief M. Anton, Dep. Chief W. Rice, Fire Dept.

Ald. Becker in the Chair called the meeting to order at 8:40 p.m.

Fire Station #1 – Consultant Recommendation and Referendum Question

The Chair said that the purpose tonight is to discuss the location and design of the proposed facility to replace fire station #1 and to invite public comment.

Becky Rudella, 1531 Underwood Avenue, commented on the process and concerns about the length of time it has taken. She and her husband bought their home in December 2004, and their immediate neighbors purchased theirs the following August. A property behind them is currently for sale, and another home to the west has also been available. Acquiring any of these homes at the time they were available would have avoided the current situation of four parcels being under consideration for acquisition for the new fire station site. Although they at first wanted to save their home, they are now tired and want to move on. They believe the “north option” is the best choice and most logical conclusion for safety during construction for both citizens and firefighters. Alternatively, building within the current footprint would put the bays right up against her windows, which would be undesirable. She and her husband signed a contract with a developer in May on the advice of their attorney and based on the long time it was taking to make a decision. Although they have never been approached by the city, they are willing to negotiate with the city on the sale of their home. She asked that the Council look at the big picture here, keep an open mind, and listen to ideas to perhaps save citizens some tax money.

Beth Neel, 1539 Underwood Avenue, said that she has spoken to elected and other city officials, developers, lawyers, contractors, neighbors, and friends. Some people, particularly the mayor, have been very responsive, kind, and communicative, but no one in a position to make a decision has ever initiated a conversation. She and her husband want what is best for the city and agree that the north option seems to offer the best coverage and operation. They also have signed with a developer, who was offering the only option at the time. They are open to talking with the city and would begin negotiations very positively and with an open mind. She urged the Council to make a decision whenever they have an opportunity to do so. Manage it well and show leadership as you consider this issue, she advised.

Heinrich Geise, 1607 Underwood LLC, said he also has an option to purchase agreement with a developer but has no objection to selling to the city. Although he does not live there, he has owned the property since 1977 and believes it will be difficult to replace. He urged the Council to consider including development plans in the process. With development interest in this area, there is an enhanced value to the properties, making it better to acquire by some form of arrangement than by eminent domain. The properties are probably worth more as a group than individually, he felt.

Brad Ehlert, 1622 Church Street, said he has e-mailed his comments to most alderpersons on behalf of the residents on the east side of Church Street abutting the proposed fire station site. As a group, they are not opposed to construction of a new fire station on Underwood Avenue, and as a member of the ad hoc advisory committee he understands the reasons for recommending the north option. There has been some discussion about acquiring 30 feet of the Church Street backyards, but residents are not interested in selling their property and would be opposed to use of eminent domain. The loss of 30 feet would negatively impact the properties, which are in a historic district, and it would also have a detrimental effect on property values. Under the north option, the station would meet nearly 100% of the program goals. Mr. Ehlert encouraged continuing discussion about the depth of the bays that could lead to a possible compromise.

Anthony Aveni, 1522 Church Street, spoke of his regard for the fire department. He asked if there is any empirical data to justify changes from the standpoint of performance results; i.e., an independent study outlining response times, value of lost property, lives saved or lost with the station as it is, and how it is estimated to improve with an upgrade or new construction. As a business owner, he has always looked at capital investments from the standpoint of a quantifiable increase in customer response and satisfaction. The facility study and Deputy Chief's research paper do not contain that type of information. An April, 2007 resolution cites an identified need to make improvements, but where is the supporting data? Without an independent analysis, there are no benchmarks on which to base cost benefits or a tax increase; there is no data on how it will improve performance results. Noting that a new station would radically alter his view to the east, Mr. Aveni said he could accept that if it is based on improving tangible response results by a wide margin as shown in an independent study done by an expert in the field rather than by opinion.

Rich Lochrie of Lochrie & Associates, 7746 Menomonee River Parkway, questioned elements of the minutes of the previous Committee of the Whole meeting, particularly references to boundaries of the south alternative. He also mentioned efforts to find the definition of "greater Underwood." He asked if anyone knows whether his property is involved in the south alternative. The Chair said he believes it is included but doesn't think that alternative will be considered. Mr. Kesner explained that the minutes are not a binding definition of anything but are basically the clerk's notes of the meeting.

Responding to some of the previous comments, Mayor Estness clarified that the south alternative/option A was discarded because it won't work from an operational standpoint. There is a notation on the diagram for that option that the office building (Mr. Lochrie's property) could remain. The north option is the preferred choice from the fire department's point of view and would provide 95% of their operational needs. Using 30 feet of the Church Street properties would get it to 100%, but a decision was made not to proceed on that issue. The Mayor noted that the city cannot make offers until there is some idea of what is to be done. The current building is an old and inefficient structure that needs to be replaced within a mile of its current location. Because of the topography, traffic concerns, and density of the area, that cannot be done without somehow acquiring some private property. The Village is a vibrant, important area of the city, and what economic development will follow will follow because it is so important to the city. Building only on the existing site would take important and valuable parking spaces from businesses during the construction process. It would be difficult to move facilities such as living quarters to a public parking lot that is not now supplied with water, electricity, or sanitary sewer. Although this is a tough decision with much time and angst leading up to it, Mayor Estness said she has found that once a decision is made

the burden is removed. She acknowledged that the Council comes to this thoughtfully and commented that she respects the honesty and candor of the residents. She noted that Zimmerman and city staff are here to help clarify or answer any concerns.

Greg Neel, 1539 Underwood Avenue, explained that his agreement with a developer followed a Community Development Committee meeting in January at which the committee recommended issuing an RFP for bids from developers on either of two city-owned sites. Signing with a developer was the best decision they could make with the information available at that time. He asked that the Council decide now how to get the requested information and make a decision within the next few weeks. He said he loves living in his present home but really wants what is best for the city.

Chief Redman clarified that “Greater Underwood” was defined in the Council’s motion as at or near the current location of the fire station. The drawings that Zimmerman prepared were based on his best understanding of the intent of that motion. Regarding the question of empirical data, he said the department primarily is driven by demand. It is not like an organization selling a product in that they do not expect to sell more with a bigger building. The building has been used as a fire station for over 60 years and had other uses before that. The city has changed dramatically since 1942 when the department moved into that three bay station. It did not extend to 124th Street, for example, and the department did not provide fire protection on the county grounds. As more responsibility was taken on, administrative staff has grown as well as the amount of apparatus. The station is operating in 2007 out of a 1942 building and now needs to catch up. Discussion of needs became more critical when considering the configuration of modern fire apparatus that doesn’t fit in the bays. We know the mechanical systems and structural conditions are not good. There are five functions—four emergency and one maintenance—operating out of three apparatus bays. Indicating that he could provide response numbers, the Chief said that the department will continue to respond to 100% of the calls for service and will continue to provide the same high quality service that they have since 1897 when the city and the fire service were formed.

In response to comments from the Chair, Chief Redman said that Zimmerman has confirmed on two occasions that the existing bays cannot be reconfigured. There is currently one piece of apparatus that won’t fit in this station, and they know that the next piece of aerial apparatus also won’t fit. There is about one-half inch on each side of the ladder truck’s mirrors when backing them into the bays. In the mid 1980s the department replaced overhead doors and did a major replacement of the apparatus floor that was anticipated at the time to provide another 10 years of use. When Zimmerman looked at the building in 1998, they estimated a cost of \$2 million for repairs and estimated a partial fix at \$1 million. The city did a temporary fix for \$330,000. In this way, the city has been doing 10-year delays of the inevitable, and it is now time to get this done properly.

Ald. Krill said that the Council needs to get together behind a decision and demonstrate the need to the community. We have taken the time needed and now should proceed. He explained that one reason for proceeding slowly was to take into consideration the private property owners, and we have now heard from three that there is no opposition as long as we make up our minds and treat them fairly.

Moved by Ald. Krill, seconded by Ald. Stepaniak to adopt a referendum question asking for authorization to borrow up to \$12.5 million to build a fire station on the property identified as the north option –

Ald. Stepaniak said this has been discussed at great length by the Community Development Committee, to some extent by the Budget and Finance Committee, and now on several occasions by this body. Arguments heard before have been repeated and there does not seem to be any new information. At this point he believes a decision should move forward. The recommended option seems sensible from a conceptual point of view, and the need has been established in terms of age of the building and the difficulty of getting apparatus in the door. He

suggested authorizing staff to initiate negotiations for acquisition of the four properties to the north while the referendum process proceeds, finalizing any action upon passage.

The mover and second accepted an amendment by Ald. Stepaniak to authorize staff to begin negotiations with the affected property owners contingent upon passage of the referendum and availability of funding –

Ald. Donegan indicated his general agreement on location as well as design regarding the apparatus piece. His concerns are size, cost, and the amount of property needed. The Chief does not anticipate employing additional staff or housing significantly additional equipment, yet the footprint under the north option is at least 1-1/2 times larger than the current footprint. He also questions allocation of space, specifically the first floor administrative and support area and the second floor, which is largely the dorm. What is the current allocation to those operations and is it so stifling that so much more is needed? In fact, the scaled site plans for the north alternative appear to be much larger than even the program specs. Also, there are 35 indoor and 20 outdoor parking spaces, the latter representing one parcel of land to be used primarily to accommodate shift changes. More discussion is needed about the need for those spaces. Ald. Donegan also asked if it is necessary and appropriate to place a vehicle maintenance facility in the Village, one of the most densely populated parts of our city with some of the most valuable land, instead of on public works yard land we already own and where we maintain most of our fleet. That function takes up at least a half parcel of land. We have a July 2006 estimate of the cost of stand-alone maintenance, fire station, and administration operations, but he would also like to know how much could be saved by a move to the public works site. Finally, considering the challenge we will have with capital funding over the next years, we should determine if there is an opportunity to outsource maintenance or for additional cooperative efforts with other municipalities.

Ald. Maher was willing to support the north location but not to establish a dollar amount at this point. He felt that this is a perfect situation for staff to work with consultants on some cost-benefit analyses, particularly in the areas mentioned by Ald. Donegan. The impact of the referendum amount on the average homeowner has been estimated at \$41-46 per year, which in one sense may not be a lot but in another is similar to the potential impact on this year's taxes had there not been a decision in final deliberations to use reserve funds.

Ald. Krol explained his thought that this meeting would be the first opportunity for the entire body to discuss issues such as cost, size, demolition impact, and staging, since much of that discussion took place only in the Community Development Committee. He would like to see this go to referendum in April, and we are somewhat ahead of the schedule to do that. He would like to see at least another session to talk about some of these issues.

Ald. Krill said that having the authority to borrow up to \$12.5 million doesn't mean we are committed to spending that amount. There is nothing to say we won't build it for less, but the details of design and ultimate cost can come after the referendum. If we wait for decisions on the entire building, we won't have an April referendum, which he feels is critical.

Ald. Didier felt that the community deserves to know what the dollars would be used for and how much is necessary but said she agrees with choosing a site. To say we might need \$12.5 million without further details is a hard sell, she commented. Although she had originally voted not to take anyone's home, she understands that a decision needs to be made.

Ald. Birschel commented on Community Development Committee decisions to study two city-owned sites and to eliminate sites he proposed. He said he feels differently about taking someone's home after hearing tonight that owners are willing to sell. He supported the need for more study.

Roll call vote on the motion, Ayes: 2; Noes: 14 (Grimm, Hanson, Krol, Maher, Meaux, Purins, Treis, Becker, Birschel, Didier, Donegan, Ewerdt)

Ald. Meaux commented that the Community Development Committee deliberated at great length but things ultimately changed. He doesn't necessarily agree with all the decisions that were made but, in the end, this is a body with 16 members. If no decision is made, nothing will be done. He urged keeping the matter before this body if there is a desire to go over everything again.

Moved by Ald. Meaux, seconded by Ald. Krill to adopt the north option as the site for the proposed facility –

Ald. Krill supported moving with all deliberate speed. We should not be going backwards and revisiting sites inasmuch as the Council decided on the "greater Underwood" site. The decision now is where to build within that broadly defined area.

Ald. Treis recounted some of the Community Development Committee's deliberations and actions, and he outlined reasons for replacing the fire station. He explained that it was his decision to not move too fast and to look at every possibility in order to come up with a site requiring the least amount of acquisition. He urged first choosing a location and then dealing with what it will cost.

Ald. Purins noted that the first presentation of any tangible plans was made just last week. He outlined some of his concerns. Was any consideration given to positioning the bays to the north of the offices where it appears there would be greater depth? He would also be concerned about building a parking structure at a cost of about \$35,000 per space unless we can demonstrate that some other alternative is not feasible. What would happen to the design if it were basement and one story? Do we need that kind of parking? He also questioned the need for incorporating headquarters and the maintenance facility, something that other stations don't have. He felt all questions could be answered very quickly and then move on.

The mover and second accepted an amendment by Ald. Donegan adding that construction of the fire station would occur somewhere south of the St. Matthew's parking lot line up to the southern edge of the current city property line with the area labeled "optional surface parking" being part of the potential site –

The mover and second accepted an amendment by Ald. Stepaniak to add that the western boundary would be the existing lot lines of the parcels to the west.

Roll call vote on the motion as amended, Ayes: 12; Noes: 1 (Purins); Present: 1 (Treis)

Discussion of scheduling the next meeting ensued. Ald. Donegan offered to meet with staff to clarify his questions. Ald. Krol suggested noticing the meeting for potential closed session regarding property acquisition, which Mr. Kesner indicated would be appropriate only for discussion of negotiating strategies and costs. Ald. Stepaniak said he would like staff input on what the existing five-year capital projects plan contains as far as commitments to other capital needs, specifically issues of timing. He noted that one of the major capital expenses, the police station addition, will be dropping off in the next few years, which could impact any decision on a referendum and cost to taxpayers.

The Chair indicated that the next meeting would likely be scheduled for December 18, 2007.

The meeting adjourned at 10:37 p.m.

Carla A. Ledesma, City Clerk
Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

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