



CITY OF WAUWATOSA
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COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
Tuesday, May 16, 2006 – 8:05 p.m.

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

EXCUSED: Alds. Herzog and Purins

ALSO PRESENT: Fire Chief Redman; Mayor Estnes; Mr. Kesner, Interim Administrator/City Attorney; Mr. Kappel, Public Works Director; Mr. Wehrley, City Engineer

Ald. Becker in the Chair

Final Report of Recommended Location for Fire Station #1. Chief Redman introduced John Sabinash, Zimmerman Design Group, 7707 Harwood Avenue, who presented the conclusions of a fire department facilities site study performed over a series of months. The study examined options for both remodeling the existing Fire Station #1 (FS1), and undertaking a new construction project.

The age and condition of the current station/department headquarters at 1463 Underwood Avenue and the efficiency of the current location in terms of meeting departmental needs were evaluated. The building was a laundry 80 years ago. Then it became a combination police/fire department. Finally it became a combination fire department headquarters/fire station. The study has attempted to address how this facility will continue to service the public on a long term basis, taking into account that operations and equipment have changed significantly.

One key point is the fact that new fire trucks no longer fit into through the existing apparatus bay doors at FS1. This problem also exists at Fire Station #2 (FS2) at 4187 N. Mayfair Road; the FS2 facility is a much newer facility and the study suggests that that situation can be remedied by the construction of an addition at FS2. Correcting structural or functional obsolescence situations at FS1 is much more complicated. (The problem of the undersized apparatus bay doors was temporarily addressed in 1998 with the purchase of low profile fire equipment. This equipment, however, has presented a variety of operational challenges for staff that make future purchases of similar trucks unlikely.)

Appendices in the study analyze the condition of the current building (including structural condition, plumbing, HVAC, and electrical systems, and code and health issues), and the undersized apparatus bay doors at FS2 mentioned previously. Appendix B identifies a total project cost to correct the door-size problem at FS2.

Mr. Sabinash stated that the study identified three possible locations for FS1: The existing location at 1463 Underwood Avenue (with the option to remodel or new-construct), the southwest corner of the intersection of N. 68th Street and Milwaukee Avenue, and the southwest corner of the intersection of Mower Court and Underwood Avenue.

Mr. Sabinash explained that several charts in the report compare space needs from a 1998 study (also by Zimmerman Design Group) with existing square footage and with proposed footage in a new or remodeled building. The area needs are broken down according to public areas/lobby, support, administration, classroom/training, firefighter/staff operations, apparatus/operations, equipment maintenance, and building maintenance. The existing building is approximately 18,050 square feet; the earlier study proposed an aggregate gross square footage of 22,619; the current study recommends a facility with approximately 31,160 gross square feet. It should be noted that the detail contained in the report makes it easier to position a new building (and parking lot) on a proposed site and determine whether that location is feasible from an operational standpoint.

Mr. Sabinash stated that the report contains construction costs specific to each proposed site. In the case of the Underwood location, both the cost of remodeling and the cost of new construction on that site are analyzed. It is important to note that the current facility is an old building used 24 hours per day; not much of the existing infrastructure would be reused. Since remodeling would entail working around a 24-hour operation, the length of such a project would likely be longer than would new construction. Furthermore, additional land adjacent to 1463 Underwood would have to be acquired to accommodate the new building and required parking.

In reviewing the Mower Court site, Mr. Sabinash noted that the land currently has a mix of commercial and residential uses. It is the largest of the three proposed sites. With all three locations, however, there are concerns about the widths of the properties. Mower Court, however, presents the least concern in that area. There are reasonable sight lines for ingress/egress of equipment. The configuration of the land is such that the maintenance bay (which is a disruptive operation for the department) could be optimally oriented to the rear. There are more opportunities to address storm water issues with the Mower Court site.

The third proposed location, N. 68th Street and Milwaukee Avenue, is sufficiently deep, but somewhat narrow. Visitor parking is more difficult to accommodate. Traffic can be problematic at this intersection at various times of the day and would likely need to be managed via signal mechanisms when calls come in. North access is harder at this location.

Cost data for all three locations (four proposals) is included in the report. Estimates range from \$9,401,150 to \$11,411,150. (These estimates include building/land acquisition, professional fees, permits and licenses, utility costs, telecommunications/technology expenses, furniture and fixtures, special equipment, occupancy expenses, and administrative costs.) Analyses were performed of similar projects, both local and somewhat distant, to confirm that the per-foot construction cost estimates are realistic. The project cost estimates reflect a square foot cost of \$180 (2006 dollars). It is anticipated construction will occur beginning in 2009.

Mr. Sabinash stated that Mower Court is recommended as the best long term option. It offers the best orientation for the building with the least compromise. It is also an expensive option. Property on Underwood would then become available for other uses, perhaps partially offsetting Mower Court acquisition costs. The current building is old and will continually need maintenance; at some point significant structural issues will need to be faced.

Mr. Sabinash briefly spoke about the possibility of resizing apparatus bay doors to accommodate taller equipment, since the situation exists at two of the three Wauwatosa fire stations. In the case of both buildings, one cannot reframe a door opening without reframing the roof. In the case of FS2, as mentioned previously, it makes more sense to construct an addition on the north side of the station; it would be less expensive than reframing as well. This issue at FS2 is critical as equipment will need to be replaced in the coming years.

In response to a question by Ald. Stepaniak about ease of access for all three locations, Mr. Sabinash stated that the Underwood location is satisfactory in term of emergency ingress/egress. Crossing the (Harmonee) bridge and proceeding south can be challenging, however. The 68th and Milwaukee site is more problematic in terms of access because of the irregular intersection. Mower Court's access is also satisfactory. The concrete apron needed in front of the apparatus bay is the shallowest (30') at the Underwood location.

Mr. Sabinash addressed the issue of land acquisition, explaining that acquisition estimates are based upon assessed values as of February 2006. These are uniform, baseline figures from which to proceed; it is understood that the actual figures will be different in three years. The cost difference among the sites is projected to be about \$1 million dollars. Any remediation anticipated to be needed for a particular site has been included in construction costs.

Ald. Birschel expressed concern about using assessed values in the calculations since the city is at approximately 80% of fair market value. Fair market value figures will like increase acquisition costs considerably.

In addressing space issues, Mr. Sabinash stated that fire stations and department headquarters are not typically housed within the same facility, though it depends upon each organization. He then explained the difference between apparatus bays and maintenance bays, noting that space needs are similar. Both are big volume areas. What differentiates the two uses is the amount of specialized equipment needed for a maintenance bay.

When asked whether any other sites were considered besides those proposed, Chief Redman replied that he worked with Community Development Director Welch and Public Works Director Kappel to identify potential locations within the service area (roughly bounded by Wauwatosa Avenue/North Avenue on the north, N. 68th Street/Milwaukee Avenue on the east, State Street on the south, and Milwaukee Avenue/Ludington Avenue on the west.) Existing uses were taken into consideration. There are limited opportunities for placement of a big, new use such as a fire station. Many sites were just too small or not well located. Other locations that were given at least preliminary consideration were N. 74th Street and Blanchard Street, the Greek Church on Wauwatosa Avenue, N. 73rd Street and Milwaukee Avenue, and property adjacent to the city hall parking lot.

Chief Redman addressed the issue of increased surface parking, stating that potential public uses of meeting areas makes more parking necessary. Furthermore, accommodation must be made for overlapping staff periods, visitors' training sessions, and police officers using the facility. At the current site, parking is divided into two lots; the overall lot size, therefore, may seem smaller from a visual standpoint. Mr. Sabinash added that the minimum required parking is for 30 staff vehicles, 6 visitor/citizen vehicles, and 12 fleet vehicles.

Responding to Ald. Didier's questions about the low profile trucks, Chief Redman explained that two were purchased in 1998. They can be housed at all three stations. However, there are operational issues with the trucks. A truck bought after that time is not low-profile and is housed at FS3. A Quint vehicle is scheduled for purchase in 2013, and a ladder truck in 2016. Purchase of low profile trucks is not recommended. A decision must be made about future plans for FS1 so that funding and equipment purchase issues can be timely resolved. A Quint vehicle costs about \$520,000; a pumper truck now on order, \$420,000. The next time a Quint is purchased, it will likely cost about \$600,000; a new ladder truck is about \$600,000 now, and will probably cost about \$800,000 by 2016. While the life span of a Quint is about 15 years, and about 18 years for a ladder truck, staff is not confident either of the low profile trucks will last that long.

Mr. Sabinash replied to a question about whether disposition of the current property has been taken into account, saying that neither the Mower Court site nor the Milwaukee Avenue site reflects expected tax revenue from the sale/redevelopment of the Underwood property. That is a financial issue yet to be determined.

Chief Redman confirmed that he supports the report’s conclusion about the suitability of the Mower Court location for a number of reasons: layout of the property, ease of ingress/egress, little loss of response time to the coverage area, and better operational configuration.

Ald. Sullivan inquired whether there was any other solution to the undersized door issue besides relocation. The proposal will be very disruptive to the neighbors abutting the new location.

Chief Redman reiterated the problems with the low profile trucks, noting that he has heard the same comments from command staff, maintenance personnel, and firefighters – that they do not provide the level of service needed. Compartments are shorter, significantly reducing storage space for needed equipment. Firefighting methods have changed since the department moved into FS1, as has the equipment that needs to be carried on trucks. No longer can fire fighters simply cling to a handrail at the rear of a vehicle. Per federal standards, all fire fighters must ride in an interior truck compartment. These regulations dictate the size of the vehicle needed. Equally important to consider, however, are the age and efficiency of the current facility.

Discussion ensued concerning the next step, if any, that needs to be taken. Mr. Kesner noted that no immediate action is necessary. But since this is a complex issue, staff felt it was necessary to make at least a preliminary presentation so that Council members can begin to familiarize themselves with this matter. He commended staff and Zimmerman Design Group for their work thus far in identifying the issues to be addressed. The matter goes far beyond the housing of trucks.

Mayor Estness echoed Mr. Kesner’s remarks, noting that this issue encompasses more than undersized bay doors; it confronts the matter of an aging facility.

In response to Ald. Donegan’s question, Chief Redman confirmed that FS2 is a separate issue in that FS2 is a viable building except for door height. As outlined in the report, an addition can satisfactorily resolve the undersized door situation at that location.

Discussion continued concerning the advisability of holding this issue in committee and asking Council members to submit their questions to staff. They can then be addressed in a future meeting with all members present.

It was moved by Ald. Krill, seconded by Ald. Birschel to schedule another Committee of the Whole meeting on June 20. In the meantime, Council members should submit questions to staff that will be answered during the next meeting. –14

Mr. Kesner clarified that written questions can be directed to him, Chief Redman, Ms. Welch, Ms. Isleb, or Mr. Kappel. Similar questions can then be grouped together for response.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

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Carla A. Ledesma, CMC, City Clerk