

The

Clarkston News

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'Neighbors' group timeline for city hall

Dear Editor,

We are, once again, sending a letter to respond to the mayor's letter. Unlike the mayor, we will tell you where you can find the facts yourself, which is always best. The mayor's letter tells us we are going to be building something; the only question is how big it is. We hope you continue to direct your elected representatives to consider alternatives before committing you to a 15-20 year obligation for a building expansion paid for at the expense of other more pressing things, such as sidewalk repair.

We have taken our information from the city agenda packets, found at www.villageofclarkston.org. Contrary to the impression the mayor letter tries to make, the city council decided early on to spend tax dollars on expanding the city hall, gave only cursory consideration to less costly alternatives, and did not take seriously the concerns raised by over a hundred residents who submitted a petition to the council. The following chronology shows that.

On **July 14, 2014**, the city manager notified the city council the owners of 3 East Church intended to sell the building and stated the mayor wanted to appoint a facilities committee at this meeting. The city manager mentioned a letter from the owners' attorney, but it's not in the packet. The facilities committee will either recommend buying 3 E. Church or building a new building. As you can see, from the beginning, they were only focusing on buying or building something. The building lease expired on Dec. 31, 2015.

On **July 28, 2014**, a four-member facilities committee was established and approved by the city council. It consisted of two city employees – Carol Eberhardt, city manager, and Jason Miller, Department of Public Works supervisor – both of whom would benefit from private offices or an expansion of the village hall. Tom Hunter, then a city council member, and Jim Brueck, a former city council member, were also appointed and approved.

On **Aug. 26, 2014**, the city manager met with James Renaud of JFR Architects, apparently chosen because he worked with the city in 2012, the last time the city considered an addition to city hall. There is no indication the job was competitively bid or a qualifications-based selection was done. The agenda packet contained a resolution stating a new facility was needed, Renaud's services were required "to begin the process of building a new facility," and the council was asked to authorize \$2,936 to pay for these services. Renaud's proposal included three options, all of which assumed a new building would be built.

On **Sept. 22, 2014**, the city council decided not to buy the building at 3 East Church "due to the price of the purchase and the cost of repairs," but they don't tell us what those costs are so we could assess for ourselves whether buying the building would cost more than building a new one.

On **Oct. 13, 2014**, the city manager advised the city council each member of the facilities committee would be considering different options for housing the equipment, and she believed the city had only six months to vacate the building once we have been given notice the lease is terminated.

On **Oct. 27, 2014**, a resolution was introduced stating the facilities committee considered other options, but they concluded, after talking to one real estate agent, there are no rental facilities close to the city. "Close" is not defined. They didn't want to store equipment outside, even though other public bodies do. And they didn't want to share space with Independence Township out of co-mingling fear and supposed difficulties transporting equipment. Therefore, they determined the best solution was to go ahead with the expansion. Renaud's architectural services, JFR Architects, were requested again because they needed him "to begin the process of building a new facility," asking for the same amount as before, \$2,936. They also submitted the same proposal from JFR Architects as before.

Nov. 24, 2014, the facilities committee was moving ahead with plans for a new DPW facility, and they considered using part of the Deer Lake Beach parking lot.

Jan. 7, 2015, to "continue the momentum" toward the new building, specifications were sent to the architect. These specifications would be used to seek bids for the new building, but they wanted to commit the city to a monthly payment equivalent to the lease at 3 East Church. The next steps were to advertise for bids, present them to city council, and move forward with site work. No information is included in the packet to tell us what the specifications were, how they were derived or how they were to be used.

Jan. 21, 2015, the facilities committee decided the best thing to do was to pay for an addition to city hall and ruled out the Deer Lake Beach property as an option. Again, we weren't provided with facts, but they do say they thoroughly investigated the matter.

Jan. 29, 2015, the architect sent three proposals, and the facilities committee asked for a fourth option.

The facilities committee decided on the plans to be presented to the city council from three plans submitted by the architect, and the architect was estimating costs.

March 5, 2015, the facilities committee met with Chase Bank to discuss financing options for the addition to city hall.

March 20, 2015, the facilities committee was moving along with its plan for the building, adjusting floor plans and getting more quotes.

April 27, 2015, the facilities committee asked the city council if it could hire the architect to prepare a bid document, so they could get cost estimates from contractors. They claimed this in no way commits the city

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A call for more comment on city hall project

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to going forward. After that, the facilities committee intended to submit a request for proposals to finance the expansion. The facilities committee made a presentation to the council for three options to expand city hall, and the city council approved paying the architect to prepare bid packages for three of the proposals, at a cost not to exceed \$23,000.

May 11, 2015, the facilities committee had met three times since the last city council meeting and planned to continue to meet this frequently “in order (to) begin construction in a timely manner.”

May 26, 2015, the facilities committee was waiting for all the measuring to be done so they could bid the project, and they added a volunteer from the Union Joints as an additional “consultant.” Union Joints is owned by Council member Sharron Catallo’s son Curt. Curt now owns 3 East Church, the building the city had to vacate when the lease was terminated.

June 22, 2015, two site plans and a construction schedule were approved by JFR Architects. There were private offices included in the drawings of the proposed city offices. They were targeting a construction start of Oct. 1, 2015, with completion on Jan. 29, 2016.

The city manager said a document retention and software package, something to reduce the amount of space required for office paperwork, is too expensive because it’s estimated to cost \$20,000-\$25,000. Apparently, spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to expand city hall to provide space to store these records is a better use of taxpayer dollars. No information was provided concerning this cost or any alternatives considered.

Finally, they listened to citizen input and explored a number of other storage options, including \$240 per month for a heated 10-by-25 storage facility. The architect was still creating the drawings to send out for bid. Although they were researching offsite storage options, the committee was discussing specific details regarding the building material.

A request was made to lease space from the Clarkston Community Schools for \$240 per month to hold the sweeper, lift, and a small dump truck. This option was researched and arranged for by concerned citizens acting independently of the city.

They were exploring other meeting places, but the library wasn’t available on Monday nights. A number of options were presented to the city council. Option #1 would require a total cost for 20 years, with interest, of \$587,668.53 and included private offices; Option #4 would require a total cost for 20 years, with interest, of \$623,530.84 and included private offices; Option #5 would require a total cost for 20 years, with interest, of \$539,392.52 with no private offices. The city published its own chronology with far

less detail than we have done, Oct. 12, 2015. They noted numerous Clarkston News articles documenting the extensive and continuing taxpayer pushback against this project, which included a petition signed by over 120 people who were against the project.

Oct. 26, 2015, the city rented climate controlled storage space at Maxx Self Storage and is using the space at the township’s Brady Lodge.

Nov. 9, 2015, there was a proposal to modify the lease with the Clarkston Community Schools. The expansion options were provided, for \$398,912, \$402,035, \$200,001 and with a continuation of the \$240 per month lease, and \$400,000, but none of these options included the cost of interest. The two plans provided include private office space. The city council asked the financing scheduled be reviewed for options 1 and 2.

Nov. 23, 2015, the finance committee was exploring the cost of borrowing \$200,000, \$305,000, and \$308,000, but they prefer “schematic #5” costing \$336,000, \$442,547.33 with interest on a 15 year loan. They were moving forward on getting a bid package together for option #5.

Dec. 3, 2015, the facilities committee was beginning the next step in the bid process. They asked for two to three options to work from regarding the appearance of the building and other details.

Dec. 30, 2015, the facilities committee met to collaborate with the Historic District Commission regarding the exterior design components of the building. They requested color and material samples.

Based on what we’ve learned from city records, the city has spent a lot of money so far on this project the mayor claims they haven’t decided to commit to: James Renaud of JFR Architects, \$2,936; Hubbell Rock and Clark, engineers, \$371.26; James Renaud of JFR Architects, \$8,350; Hubbell Rock and Clark, \$666.34; Hubbell Rock and Clark, \$883.36; Hubbell Rock and Clark, \$281.34; Hubbell Rock and Clark, \$6,268.56; Hubbell Rock and Clark, \$63.72; and Hubbell Rock and Clark, \$153.90.

That totals \$19,974.48. Recall also the council authorized up to \$23,000 more for the purpose of preparing bid packages. It is unclear whether the \$8,350 JFR charge noted above was made against the \$23,000 maximum authorization, and it is also unclear whether other charges have been paid but not specifically identified.

Now let’s look at what the mayor said in his letter. He claims no decisions have been made, but the money authorized and spent to date could range from \$34,624.48 to \$42,974.48, depending on whether the \$8,350 JFR charge is part of the \$23,000 authorization. He said the city “ultimately decided” to invest in a new asset – that certainly sounds like a done deal and a decision has been made, doesn’t it. He doesn’t tell you how long we rented the building at 3 East Church Street, but the fact

we paid rent for decades totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars doesn’t have any bearing on whether the taxpayers should be committed to a huge expenditure going forward.

And, while taxes may not be raised specifically for this project, the increased taxes you pay as a result of inflation will most certainly be required to pay for this expansion and that is what the treasurer meant when she said it would be paid for with higher taxes in addition to the use of all other available funds. The proposed budget for next year, and all other years, has no funds for things like sidewalks, street repairs, storm water management, etc. as they are required to pay for this building.

Listen to the recording of the **Nov. 23, 2015**, city council meeting to hear exactly what was said. The mayor wouldn’t even rule out building private offices in the future. As far as the mayor is concerned, you aren’t going to have a say in whether the expansion will be built; the only input you will have is which expansion project you will pay for. The city manager’s comment to the *Clarkston News* on Jan. 7, 2016, confirms this when she said “administration goals include completing an addition to city hall.”

Since we’re focusing on “facts,” we also want to mention it was quite misleading for Mr. Luginski to send you a letter signed as “the mayor,” because it suggests he leads and speaks for the city. That’s actually not true. The City of the Village of Clarkston has its very own Constitution, which is referred to as the Charter. It was authorized by you, the voters, it cannot be altered without a public vote, and it gives the mayor no power to run our city except in an emergency.

Mr. Luginski does have ceremonial powers, so if you want one of those fake keys to the city or need someone to ride around in a parade, he’s your guy. He leads the city council meetings, unless he’s absent, in which case someone else leads the meeting, but he is their equal and has only one vote. So, if our government wanted to send you a letter with any real authority behind it, it would have been signed or approved by all the members of the city council. You can read this for yourself, since it’s all spelled out in section 4.9 of our Charter.

Shouldn’t there be an open public discussion about whether it’s really in the city’s best interest to commit hundreds of thousands of dollars and take on a 15 to 20 year debt to expand city hall? Shouldn’t the city council set aside the decision it has seemingly already made and seriously consider alternatives based on fact as opposed to opinions? Shouldn’t they consider whether the money they are ready to commit to this project could be better spent on other city services, or even left in the taxpayers’ pockets by lowering taxes? If you’re concerned, contact your council members.

Your Clarkston neighbors