



Watertown City Council
Monday, June 13, 2016
7:00 p.m.

WORK SESSION AGENDA

Discussion Items:

Arsenal Street Bridge Project

- NYS DOT Region 7: David Hart, Jeff Grill, and Tom King

City Court Expansion

- Justin L. Wood, City Engineer



CITY OF WATERTOWN
ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT
MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 8, 2016

TO: Sharon Addison, City Manager

FROM: Justin Wood, P.E., City Engineer

SUBJECT: City Court Expansion – Conceptual Design Update

Schematic drawings for the City Court Expansion project were developed and submitted to the OCA in October 2015. The layout incorporated revisions made to the original concept, based on comments received by OCA through previous submittals and meetings. The premise of that design provided security for the Court spaces only, and kept access to municipal operations of City Hall unsecured.

The current City Council majority reversed course, and requested the entire building be secured. City staff and Mayor Butler met with the OCA on May 24 2016, to discuss the implications of a fully secured building once again, and to review the October 2015 submission. OCA verbally approved the schematic design minus a couple minor tweaks. The Court also expressed their preference for Washington Street being the main secured entrance, in large part to provide a single line of sight from the screening area, to the two courtroom entrances.

This leads the project back to City Council to get concurrence with a secured Washington Street entrance to City Hall, or to stick with a secured Sterling Street entrance, before the design can be advanced. OCA prefers to use the Sterling St. entrance for handicap persons only, through use of a buzzer if no guards are manning the door, which would signal the court security officers to admit and screen the individual. That said; a handicap ramp may still be required to be installed at the Washington St entrance to get persons up the change in elevation in the lobby, depending on how the court plans to staff the handicap entrance, the level of renovation, and further Code Analysis.

As mentioned, the main benefit of the Washington Street entrance, from a security perspective, is the line of sight for Court officers to both Court Room entrances, while screening visitors at the other end of the hallway. This entrance would result in less impact to existing utilities as compared to Sterling St, and has the benefit of an existing roof system under the overhang. If a handicap ramp is required, however, the addition would be considerably larger than the Sterling St option, by a couple hundred square feet or more. Either option has pro's and con's however the cost difference is believed to be relatively insignificant compared to the project as a whole. In very rough, conceptual numbers, the addition could be as large as 600 sf - 800 sf, at a cost of \$120,000 to \$160,000 or more depending on building, site, and utility impacts.

It is important to note, that if City Hall as a whole is secured, access will be restricted to the main secure entrance only. This would require all City employees, delivery companies, and public visitors to go through the main entrance and full security screening process, albeit City employees could utilize a new ID badge system to bypass the screening. The entrance which is NOT chosen for primary access will be restricted to emergency exiting only, and possibly handicap access at Sterling St. It is also likely the court will ask to restrict the employee entrance in the basement for afterhours use only. Meaning during normal business hours, all employees will be required to enter through secure entrance.

When the second City Court Judge was appointed to the City of Watertown in 2013, it was anticipated the City would have to provide a 1,200 sf Criminal Courtroom, as per the minimum OCA standards. The City negotiated a compromise with OCA to provide a smaller 675 sf court room which would function as a Civil Courtroom only. The new courtroom coupled with minor build out of existing storage rooms led to a relatively moderate project that left much of the first floor untouched, and the project in the \$1 Million plus range. Based on the reviews and comments the City has received from OCA, and the requested facilities that have been added to the proposed project, we are now doing major renovation work on the first floor which essentially modifies the entire court space plus Code Enforcement offices at a cost closer to the \$2 Million range.

If the City moves forward with these improvements as depicted in the schematic design, there is little flexibility and minimal physical space to accommodate future growth in staffing or services for the Court system or City of Watertown. OCA has begun a CASA drug court program here at City Hall, on a pilot program basis, which will likely be expanded to cover the entire County, or more as it develops. *It begs the question of whether a potentially \$2 Million dollar investment/renovation in a building bursting at the seams, is the right investment.* Is an offsite location a better investment of funds for both entities? Are there other facilities available, such as the County Court Complex, where compromise and innovative scheduling could absorb the additional load of the City Court system? When the Jefferson County Court Complex was being planned and designed, the City was asked to co-locate City Court there, but the City Council at that time declined. The project proceeded without making complete accommodations for the City Court.

These are big picture questions about issues which may take years or decades to realize, but should be considered nonetheless. Should City Council decide to continue with the project as currently progressed, a decision to select the main secured entrance must be made to allow further design development.

Enc.

Cc: Shawn McWayne, Code Enforcement Supervisor

