



MEETING DOCUMENTATION

Planning • Architecture • Engineering • Interiors • Facility Management

PROJECT: Dixon County LEC – Citizens Committee Meeting #8

LOCATION OF MEETING: Ponca Community Hall, 123 West 3rd Street, Ponca, NE

PROJECT NO.: 222701 **DATE:** February 16th, 2023 **TIME:** 6:00 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mathew Michl
Jeanne Blatchford
Dave Armstrong
Ken Pavlushik
Cindy Purucker
Ron Mahler
Verlin Hanson
Julie Hartung
Chuck Chinn
DJ Smith
Lisa Lunz

COMMUNITY/ORGANIZATION:

Martinsburg
Maskell
Rural North
Township
County Clerk
Ponca
Concord
Dixon
Emerson
Mayor of Ponca
County Supervisor

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MEMBERS ABSENT:

Kari Lowe
Larry Boswell
Blake Eisenmann
Tom Decker
Jack Moore

Ponca
Allen
Rural South
County Sheriff
Newcastle

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PROCHASKA & ASSOCIATES:

Steve Johnson
Curt Field

Prochaska & Associates (P&A)
Prochaska & Associates (P&A)

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GUESTS PRESENT:

Don Andersen
Cindy Geis
Ron Geis
Amy Watchorn
Melissa Gensler
Mark Brewer
Terry Nicholson
Neil Blohm
Steve Hassler
Deric Anderson
Sarah Kumm
Rich Lamprecht
Quinn Rohan
Jeff Hartung
Iris Dutton
Roger Peterson
James Lehmkuhl
Jill Lehmkuhl

County Board of Supervisors
County Citizen
County Citizen
County Staff
County Staff
County Citizen
County Supervisor
County Supervisor
County Supervisor
County Supervisor
County Staff
Sheriff's Deputy
Clerk of the District Court
County Citizen
Ponca
County Citizen
Mayor of Wakefield
County Citizen

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DISCUSSION:

The purpose of the meeting was to consider options for a new Jail, or new Courthouse/County Offices/Jail, in light of previous information gathered by the Committee. The following points were recorded:

1. As this was a special Meeting of the Dixon County Board of Supervisors, it was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance, and roll for Board members was taken. The Citizen's Committee meeting was otherwise held normally, with several members of Jail Staff and members of the County also in attendance. Unofficial attendance was counted at 32.
2. Andy Forney, with DA Davidson, Bond Council for Dixon County, was also in attendance, to discuss the County's bonding potential. Chris Harrifeld with Nebraska Jail Standards was scheduled to attend, but was unable due to weather complications.
3. Working from the Agenda, Curt Field summarized the seven (7) location options which the Committee has so far considered, providing bullet points both pro and con, and asking Committee Members for additional comments. The Committee was asked to eliminate or prioritize options to reduce the list to a more manageable size.
 - The attendees worked with Handouts provided by Prochaska & Associates describing graphically each location. In each example, the entire area of the Courthouse and County Offices, minus the Jail and Sheriff's Offices, was portrayed as a single story simple rectangle, and the Jail and Sheriff's Office was portrayed as the 14-bed single story template offered by the prior Needs Assessment phase—the purpose being to verify if such a plan might fit on the site, and if so, approximately how much land might be required. Such additional issues as site drive paving, parking stalls, access to surrounding road system, onsite storm water detention, and proximity to the 100-year flood were also shown (or Base Flood Elevation (BFE)).
4. Curt asked in each case for additional comments from either Committee Members or the public, and following the summary, also asked if the existing Courthouse/County Offices Building should remain under consideration, as an eighth option. Regarding the Site Option summaries, the following comments were recorded:
 - One individual felt that *everyone* agreed the existing structure should not be fully repaired or be added on to, primarily due to the presence of significant ground water in the area.
 - Several individuals felt that Option 1 (Ponca, south of County Annex) was the best one, despite the need to raise the ground.
 - DJ Smith reported that the City of Ponca would fully support the Option #1 property, in terms of extending utilities, or with help acquiring land, or flood-level planning.
 - The Option 1 landowner had been contacted about a County purchase, and seemed amenable.
 - One individual felt that additional inquiries with NNTC and Great Plains (communications) for available utilities, would also be a necessity to enable better decisions, for all of the options.
 - One individual felt that the old School Building and site in Newcastle should be considered as a possible location for a new Courthouse and/or Jail.
 - One individual felt that the property immediately south of the Option #7 property (on Highway #12) had experienced unstable soils, meaning that this property as well should be further investigated. Curt suggested that a Geotechnical "Phase One" or "Phase Two" investigation might be performed on the Option #7 property to learn more.
 - One individual commented that the gravel surface of Cook Street would need to be paved as part of the cost of Option #6b.

- One individual stated that moving a new Jail and Courthouse *outside of Ponca* should be eliminated, and she admitted that she lived in the southern portion of the County. Another individual strongly disagreed with this. Comments from County staff in regards to relocation concerned the issue of the need for a variety of services available nearby for things like grocery shopping, doctor/pharmacy needs, etc.
 - Jail staff commented that the need for medical treatment is important in the Jail, stating that Martinsburg has no ambulance service. It was deemed important that the Committee hear very specifically from the Jail staff regarding relocation before making a firm decision. We were reminded that Sheriff Decker is on the Committee, although absent from this meeting.
 - Matt Michl suggested that his top four Options would be #3 (Martinsburg), #4 (Allen), #6b (Ponca, Cook Street), and #1 (Ponca, south of the County Annex),
 - Matt Michl suggested that he could eliminate Options #2 (Friendship Memorial Park location), #5 (north of Ponca on Hwy #26E), and #6a (house east of Cooks Gas).
 - Ken Pavlushik stated that his top three Options would be Option #4 (Allen), #3 (Martinsburg), and #1 Ponca, south of the Annex).
 - One individual suggested that the Memorial Park Option (#2), with children playing nearby, would be an inappropriate location for a new Jail.
 - One individual suggested that Wakefield would also be acceptable for a new facility, since it also had surrounding site amenities, but a response to this was that Wakefield is on the extreme south end of the County, meaning that public/staff travel times would be equally lengthy.
 - One Committee member asked the other members if they could agree to “build something somewhere”, and this appeared (informally) to be a consensus.
5. Curt again asked the Committee to think primarily about what is best for the County, and eventually agree to a single location solution. For example, moving the Courthouse out of Ponca will require a separate vote of the Citizens, and possibly alienate those voters in Ponca. *The Committee is proposed to act as a Campaign Committee during a possible Bond campaign, so must have unity.*
 6. The Mayor of Wakefield made a statement that he would support a single Committee decision, wherever it may be.
 7. Lisa suggested that the Committee be polled prior to the March Meeting for their ranked top three Options. Results can be tabulated and brought to the next meeting. Curt will send out an email and all members agreed to participate.
 8. Curt suggested that the Committee could hold Focus Groups in other towns following this narrowing of options, perhaps using of display boards depicting the Committee’s top Options, accompanied by pros and cons bullet points.
 9. Andy Forney (DA Davidson) spoke about the County’s bonding capacity. His company has for some time been the Bond underwriter for Dixon County. Andy distributed print copies of his recent research, addressing the following issues:
 - The “Nickel Tax” option, which by statute allows Counties to impose a 5.2 cents per \$100 levy for Courthouses and related County departments without a public referendum, would generate around \$8 to \$9 million.
 - Dixon County is quite healthy financially, with a taxable valuation of \$1,476,712,898, and a current tax rate of 0.239417 cents per \$100, with a limit of .50 cents. Debt-to-Tax ratio is 0.033%.

- A capital project of between \$8 and \$20 million cost, financed by General Obligation Bonds with 20-year maturity, would increase the County levy between 7 – 10 cents per \$100 valuation, with a projected annual payment of between \$1,075,000 and \$1,533,000. This would translate to an increase of \$72.70 annually on a \$100,000 valuation for residential property, and between \$2,389 and \$2,628 per acre annually for farm land (dry or irrigated).
- Andy suggested that at a predicted 4% interest rate, the General Obligation Bonds would likely appear an attractive investment to wealthier individuals, corporate investors, and banks, etc.

10. A Sheriff's Office staff member gave the highlights of the recent Jail Standards Inspection Report:

- The Jail was found to be technically "compliant", but has problems which at present are "grandfathered-in".
- The access from ground to the third floor Jail is not ADA-compliant, nor is it safe for staff and arrestees.
- Booking area and Dispatch areas in the Sheriff's Office-Jail are too close to one another, with obvious safety concerns, i.e., a 9-1-1 call could certainly disrupt a booking in-progress.
- The present mold problem, though mitigated, will likely recur and require treatment annually.
- The Cell doors are obsolete and the keys to the door locks are not replaceable. Jail Standards requires oversight for all capital expenditures exceeding a modest amount.
- County liability for Jail staff injury is quite high under current conditions
- The capacity of the two multi-occupant cells is severely limited due to the inability to offer separation of inmates by classification, resulting in out-boarding requirements. Other Counties are increasingly either unable or unwilling to take excess or unruly Dixon County inmates.

11. The Jail Staff also provided highlights of the recent State Fire Marshall's inspection:

- The Jail facility is not fire-sprinkled, nor properly separated by fire-rated partitions. This is a significant violation of the Life Safety Code, and the SFM has the power to compel this, or close the facility.
- Third Floor (and Second Floor) emergency exiting is served by a single unenclosed stair, and an exterior fire escape which does not allow access by all areas of the floors.

12. The meeting was concluded at approximately 9:00pm. The next Citizen's Committee Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 16th, at the County Annex building, at 6:00pm.

BY: 
 Curtis Field, AIA
 Architect - Principal

February 17st, 2023
 Date

If any of the parties present take exception to these meeting notes, please notify Prochaska & Associates within five (5) days of issuance for correction or they shall be presumed to stand as written.

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