



Board of County Commissioners

April 26, 2024

Honorable Gary Vegar
Mayor, City of Prosser

RE: Benton County Courthouse Shared Use/Peration Costs Discussions

Mayor Vegar,

Thank you for your time thus far in discussing the potential to co-locate City and County services at the County courthouse campus in Prosser. Below you will find responses to the questions you posed to us in your April 2 letter. After you've had an opportunity to review these please let us know if you'd like to meet and have further discussions.

Sincerely,

Jerrod MacPherson
County Administrator

Questions for each property:

1. What are your long-term plans for the Benton County Courthouse property?

Prosser is the County seat. As such the County must maintain certain offices within the Courthouse to remain in compliance with RCW. While some services have migrated to the larger population area the County's long-term plan for the courthouse is to maintain required services there. That would only be reconsidered if there were a vote of the people to relocate the County seat. Currently we are not aware of any movement on that matter, and it is not something the County is actively advocating for.

2. Is the property available for purchase?

The Courthouse property is not currently available for purchase. That would only be reconsidered if the County seat was moved (see above). The County does have two other adjacent properties that it plans to sell in the coming years. One is the property currently occupied by the City and the other is a house across the street from the post office.

3. Is the property available for long term lease (25+ years)?

The County would be interested in a long-term lease of the portions of the property it does not need to maintain required services.

4. Are there building or business operational costs we can share?

Yes. The County would like to share any costs that are feasible to split with another party related to having a second tenant in the Courthouse. Those would include utilities, building maintenance, janitorial, landscaping, information technology services, insurance costs, etc.

Questions specific to the Courthouse:

1. What is the long-term plan for the Annex Building?

We have a couple of buildings called the Annex, so we'll address each:

The Planning Annex, where the City is located now, was slated to be sold right around the time of the Fire at City Hall. Our long-term plan remains to sell it.

The Courthouse annex (white building attached to the original courthouse) is an integral part of the Courthouse. Its long-term plan is the same as the courthouse overall (see above). However, the County could relocate all its current services out of the annex and place them in the original courthouse building if another party wanted to occupy just the annex portion. The County would need to retain some access to the annex for the elevator there.

The brick building adjacent to the courthouse, which we call the old engineering building, has no long-term plan. At one point the County was going to refinish the inside to create a file storage building but with us going more digital that need no longer exists. For now, the building will remain empty until a need is identified for its use.

2. Is it feasible for the City and County to collaborate on an expansive renovation of the Annex building?

Yes. Renovation of any of the above buildings could be considered as part of a tenant improvement plan if the City looked to lease that portion of the property. The cost of such a renovation would have to be discussed but the County would expect the majority of that to be borne by the new tenant.

3. Is it feasible to build a parking structure in the south parking lot or other parking areas?

Maybe, though all of those lots are smaller than what you would typically see a footprint for even a small parking structure. The most feasible would be the east parking lot as it is the largest of the 3. There are more than 105 parking stalls available immediately adjoining the courthouse between on street and parking lot spaces. The

County also has an overflow parking lot adjoining the old planning annex. The city could pursue this if they determined it was needed but the County has no interest in participating in the cost of a parking structure.

4. Would parking lots/areas be designated for specific use?

They could be if that was desired. Currently the County only designates one area for a specific use and that is a fenced area for County owned vehicles to park. This was added recently to help reduce vandalism and theft of fuel from our vehicles left at the property overnight.

5. How could janitorial staffing and supply be shared?

Benton County utilizes a contracted service for janitorial services at all its buildings. We would be willing to maintain this practice and allocate appropriate costs to the City based on the space occupied by the City. The County would also be open to the City contracting directly for their own janitorial services if so desired.

6. Who is responsible for facility maintenance both interior and exterior of the building?

Benton County currently uses its facilities staff, supplemented with certain contracted services, to maintain the buildings. The County would be willing to continue this practice with some of the costs allocated to the City proportionally based on how much space the City occupies. This arrangement is similar to our arrangement with the Benton Franklin Health District who leases a portion of a building from us on our Kennewick Campus.

7. Responsibility of the exterior grounds?

Benton County utilizes a contracted service for landscape services (lawn mowing and general clean up). We also contract for specific items of work such as tree trimming when the need arises. The County is open to discussions on changing this practice for the Courthouse campus if the City is able to take over some or all of those duties.

8. Is the Commissioners Hearing Room available for City Council meetings?

The current Commissioners meeting room on the third floor is not set up to accommodate more than 3 members at the dais at a time. While it may be possible to reconfigure the dais for more people the room itself is narrow and seating would be tight. Security in the evening would also be a concern. There is no way to secure certain areas of the building due to the need to access the elevator and restrooms. Someone would have to sweep each floor at the conclusion of any meeting to ensure no one remained inside. This is a primary reason why we use the first-floor meeting room for afterhours meetings.

9. If not, is the conference area on the first floor sufficient in space and technology in order to be converted into Council Chambers?

The conference room on the first floor is set up with all of the video and audio technology that the third floor conference room has. The room is fully capable of conducting meetings using remote technology (zoom, Teams, Webex, etc). This room is utilized by our planning commission for their monthly meetings, and that use would need to continue, but it could serve as a City Council chamber as well. The County would be open to making improvements to the furnishing and finishes in the room as well.

10. Is there an opportunity to discuss/execute interior office modifications to the facility to accommodate City organization needs and functions?

Yes, the County expects that if we could reach an agreement for the City to co-locate to the campus (either in an annex or the courthouse) that some reconfiguration would be needed to accommodate the new use.

11. Is partnering feasible regarding IT services, office equipment, such as copy machines, large map printers, etc.?

Yes. The County has its own IT staff which could likely provide support services to the City. More discussion would be needed on equipment to determine how costs and ownership would be divided.

12. Can we collaborate on a reception and/or meet and greet area?

We are open to the idea but with how ingress and egress to the courthouse and the courthouse annex are it might be logistically difficult to have a single point or reception for members of the public.