

North Powder City Council Special Meeting
August 19, 2020
6:30 PM Wolf Creek Grange

Attendance: Mayor Mike Wisdom, Councilors Dennis Lefever, Mike (Big Mike) Morse, Joyce Lawyer, David (Shorty) Schwehr, and Jeff Grende, City Recorder Beth Wendt. Councilor Logan McCrae was excused.

Community members: Jane Wisdom, Ernie Dias, Candace Bowman, Walt & Mary Brookshire, Sue DeHaas, Susan Wirkala, Bev Bigler, Gaynell & Laura Dougherty, Carol Bouchard.

Mayor Mike called the meeting to order and the Pledge of Allegiance was said.

Mayor Mike explained the purpose to the meeting was to discuss pros and cons of purchasing one of two properties; the Rural Fire Districts portion of the fire department building and the old "Oddfellows" building at end of E Street that belongs to Sharon Stanford. All of the councilors in attendance have seen both properties. Realtors Walt Brookshire & Candace Bowman were in attendance to answer questions regarding the Stanford property.

Beginning with the fire station, Jeff noted that pros included it is an open box and the city already owns half so the city would own the entire building. It has sufficient parking out front. We could add walls at a lesser cost. It is structurally sound and already has restrooms. It is also close to where the City Hall office is already so it ties in to better to centralize it. Cons include some upgrades to get it up to par but they would be minimal compared to another location. We haven't really talked about the time line to get into a building. Either project will cost money to get into or we need to discuss where the money will come from. Mayor Mike thought a portion of the time line would depend on whether or not it can be done in phases. Neither building is ready to move into immediately. Joyce wanted to see a move within one to two years. Mayor Mike thought part of that would depend on who does the work and how complete the building has to be before we move in. Joyce thought it could be done in phases with grants for either building. Mayor Mike wondered if grants for the Library would have to be for a separate Library building. Joyce thought the office wall in the fire department would have to be knocked out because it is not big enough. Jeff added that a floor plan is something else we haven't really talked about. Mayor Mike agreed and hoped to go into this professionally and do it right and that means we can't do it cheap. We need to consider if there is enough room to do what we want to do. Joyce agreed it needs to be nice when it is finished because we will be stuck with it. Joyce thought the rural fire department was 1558 square feet and the paved area was 2640 square feet.

Shorty felt one of the pros to the Stanford property is that we would be purchasing the lots from 2nd to 1st Street, 100 feet deep. The building itself is over 8000 square feet. For the money we would be acquiring quite a bit of assets for the City. Big Mike wondered if we would have the ability to collect revenue from the apartment in the Stanford building. Mayor Mike thought it was a possibility. It could also be used as a "hostile" for various people. He didn't feel the City should be a landlord but we have talked about temporary housing for employees. Joyce thought the fire department would cost more money from out of pocket than the Stanford building because of grants. But the Stanford building would probably take longer. Mayor Mike noted there is a slight slope to the floor in the fire department that would have to be looked into.

Dennis commented that the fire department was a newer building. Granted it would take some work to remodel, but it is all one level so it would already be handicap accessible. The con would be that the money to fix it up would be it would most likely have to come from the City's budget.

Mayor Mike agreed that a certain amount of expense will have to come from the City for either building. Joyce thought we would have to install more restrooms for the library in the fire station. Mayor Mike wondered if the current restrooms were handicap accessible. Nobody knew for sure.

Mayor Mike noted that the purchase of the Stanford property would mean acquiring a lot more property but if at some point the city decided to, we could sell off part of the empty lots for about the same amount as the purchase price. The two lots on the north side are zoned commercial and the 2 on the south side are zoned industrial. Sue wanted to know the asking price. Shorty said it was \$125,000. Walt clarified that the empty lots were about \$40,000 and the building itself was \$85,000 which averaged less than \$10 per square foot. Mayor Mike noted that it would tie into the property the City owns on 1st Street. He was a bit surprised at how ready the newer/hardware side of the Stanford building was. There is about 10" of insulation above the ceiling already. He has talked to Dale Mammen, from La Grande, who is very knowledgeable about getting buildings on the historic register and getting grants. Not only are there grants for historic restoration but also for being on the Oregon Trail. Mayor Mike thought this should happen in phases. The first being to acquire the property and do what is needed to get City Hall and the library in and functioning. The second phase would be to get it on the National Historic Registry so we can start applying for grants. It would be a process. He didn't think it would be too expensive to create a historic district. Walt thought it was not much more expensive to create a district than it was to register a single building. SHPO would be a good resource. Jeff wondered if all work on a historic buildings had to be done by a contractor. Walt thought it didn't really matter who did the work as long as it meets historic standards and there are grants that can help to defer some of the expense for "period" requirements. Jeff asked what kind of roof was on the building. Walt said it is a hot roof on the newer section and it is 10 years ago. Joyce thought with more space, the city could do more with the Stanford building even though it would take longer to do it. We could have a museum area in the library, a meeting room, and a couple of offices just in the downstairs part. Mayor Mike thought we could utilize the Library for Council meetings if need be. Susan Wirkala noted that the current Library is very cramped and there is no room for expansion. She wondered if there would be room for the library to expand in either building. Shorty thought there wouldn't be a lot of room at the fire department. Jeff reiterated that we don't have a floor plan so we can't really say. He added that we would have to put in new bathrooms in the Stanford building. The second floor would be unusable without an elevator. Mayor Mike didn't think ADA was a deal breaker at this time. He thought we would get grants to do the "Odd Fellows" side of the building. There is a lot of usable space where an elevator could be put in and grant money to do so. There is an upside to having established restrooms in the fire department but unless a second set is put in, there will be traffic moving through city hall to use them. Either way, there will be expense for restrooms. If we go with the Stanford building, the City will still own 3 bays of the fire station. The old Library and City Hall could be torn down and incorporated into the park. The Library would bigger than it is now regardless of which building it is in. Susan Wirkala reiterated that it would be nice to have more seating space and maybe an area to feature the Oregon Trail and North Powder history. Mayor Mike thought the hardware side alone would have more room than what the library has now. Joyce thought Bev Bigler would be interested in adding the Post Office building to a historic district. She also thought the Grange would be interested. Mayor Mike commented that even if the City doesn't own the Stanford building it doesn't change the possibility of a historic district.

Sue DeHaas noted that the City has been wrestling with a decision about City Hall and the Library for over 15 years. The North Powder Community Partners were formed in 2007 specifically to help do something about them. There have been at least 7 different ideas and plans looked at, including the M&M building, the Huddleson building, the fire station, and building new next to the City Shop. This is a new idea for a solid rock building with a lot of space and lots of opportunities on the Oregon Trail. It is still in the core of the City. It could be fixed up in phases and if it turns out it doesn't work, the City

could sell it and do something else. But there is room to expand. The fire department was built as a fire station and not an office. It could be used in conjunction with the City Shop to store equipment. The NP Partners 501C3 can't chase grants for the City until we own something. We need to think about the future of the City. There is a lot of open space that could be developed. The Food Bank may need a home in the future. It is adjacent to property that the City already owns. She liked the idea of the Stanford building but the City needs to make a decision. Mayor Mike remarked that the more uses we can come up with for the building, the more grants are available. Sue DeHaas commented that the money is not that much different so we need to think about which is the better investment. Mayor Mike thought there were a number of things that could be done with the Stanford building but it will take patience and perseverance.

Ernie Dias agreed it was a hard decision to make but the fire station is a newer building and would be easier and cheaper to put up divisions.

Bev Bigler commented that she and her husband felt the City should utilize what we already have. She wondered how the Rural Fire District could sell part of the fire station if there is no partition. She also wanted to know how they came about owning one third of the building in the first place. Beth clarified that the RFD actually owns about half of the building. They built their part and the City added on so the RFD owns 4 walls and the city owns 3. There is a walk through door between the RFD and the City. The City owns the empty lot and the end of the building next to the lot. The office area and restrooms are in the RFD part of the building and they own 2 bays. Sue DeHaas clarified that the City owns 2/3 of the property but not 2/3 of the building. Beverly agreed with Ernie Dias that the fire station was a newer building and was structurally sound and wouldn't cost as much to remodel. She also thought the location was good.

Mayor Mike read an email from Linda Dixon who felt trading one old building for another was not a good use of city finances. She felt it wouldn't be easy to list it as historical and get grants, plus there are a lot of restrictions. Insurance would be higher. If the City purchased the fire station we could drop the ceiling, insulate the walls and put up sheet rock. We would have a fairly new building and wouldn't have to worry about wiring or plumbing. She also thought the price would be negotiable. Walt Brookshire noted that the property owner has to agree to participate as a historic building. If you agree to participate you establish a plan and follow through. Mayor Mike thought the wiring in the Stanford building was all that old. Linda Dixon went on to suggest that the City could just move into the part of the fire station that the City already owns. She felt it would cost more than the \$100,000 that the RFD is asking to update the building. Parking is more feasible at the fire station and it is more centrally located. The Stanford building would be a waste of money and would take forever to finish.

Beth felt the City should really look at the pros and cons of the two properties. The Stanford property includes the entire building plus 4 oversize lots. The fire station is only half a building with a sub-standard size lot. The Stanford property will take a lot more time and money to fix up but there are more grant opportunities available. The fire station is a much newer building and we already know it is sound building and it is all ground level. There is some room for expansion on the empty lot next to the building but chances of getting a grant to help cover the cost is pretty slim. Just because grants are available, there is no guarantee we would get them. Many people think the empty lot across from the Post Office already belongs to the City and they wonder why the City doesn't take care of it. There is a lot of potential to clean it up and make it a nice downtown park. We already own part of the fire station but we would have to invest money to purchase the RFD's half and to remodel. We could probably sell the big doors to recover some of the cost. The building has a fairly new roof. There is water and sewer in the RFD part of the building so there would need to be some work there to add restrooms to the other side. On the other hand, it will take some major work to re-vamp restrooms in the Stanford building. The fire station is centrally located on the City "campus" but the Stanford building

is not that far away. Beth reiterated that there is a lot of potential to either building and before making a decision, you should really think about the pros and cons of each.

Sue DeHaas agreed that the City needs to make a decision. We can't leave either party hanging. The prices are not that much different. Jeff felt the Stanford building was a great opportunity and the price was well below what it is worth. There is plenty of room but there is a lot of work that needs to be done and we would be buying something with the hope of getting grants to fix it up. Walt noted that some grants are a 50/50 match but they generally don't care where the match comes from. It could be from another grant. Jeff was concerned that we haven't had inspections on the Stanford building and it might be cheaper for the City to use "out of pocket" money to remodel the fire station than it would be to match grants for the Stanford building. We wouldn't be able to move in to either building immediately. Walt noted that as a commercial building we would have to hire plumbers, electricians, and a contractor for some of the structural work. Mayor Mike thought we could just start with the hardware part of the building. Jeff agreed it could be fixed up in phases, but we need to consider the whole building. Mayor Mike thought the first thing would be to acquire property. Jeff reiterated that we still need to look at the whole project even if the work is done in phases. Mayor Mike reiterated that either way, it will have to be done in phases. The fire station is clean and has good black top but if we can't look down the road 5 to 10 years, the Stanford building probably won't go anywhere. Shorty made a motion to pursue the Stanford property. Joyce seconded. Motion carried with 3 in favor, Shorty, Joyce and Big Mike. Jeff and Dennis were opposed.

Jeff proposed that the City pay to have someone look at the Stanford building. Shorty thought part of the process before taking possession was to have a complete inspection of the property. Candace Bowman added that we can add whatever we want in the offer, including an inspection. Mayor Mike stressed that there was no dollar amount included in the motion. It was to pursue the option only. Jeff was okay with pursuing as long as there was no money. Mayor Mike thought we had a little bit of time to work on both options as long as Sharon Stanford knew the City was interested. He thought she would be like to have payments. Jeff was interested in getting more information. Dennis agreed. He was concerned that if we don't get grants, the City would have to fork out a lot of money. Sometimes you have to apply for grants over and over. Joyce suggested we hire a grant writer. Walt suggested we talk to Brian McDowell who works for Business Oregon.

Jeff would like to have a workshop to go over what we want and talk about the stages as this was the first he'd about that. If the idea is to just look at options, he wanted to change his vote to pursue the Stanford property. Beth interjected that doing things in stages would take a major commitment on behalf of the Council and the community. Candace Bowman remarked that if the City was interested, we should build a foundation to make an offer. Be sure everyone agrees to a price and the terms including a timeframe and who does what.

Meeting adjourned then called back to order to amend the vote to pursue the Stanford property. Joyce made a motion to amend the vote to pursue the Stanford property. All were in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 8:10PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Attest:

Beth Wendt
City Recorder