

GRAFTON COUNTY COURTHOUSE MEETING

Administration Building
North Haverhill, NH 03774
October 18, 2022

PRESENT: Commissioner Piper, County Administrator Libby, Admin, Assistant Norcross, Maintenance Supt. Oakes, Director of Communications Andross, Sheriff Stiegler, County Attorney Hornick, Office Administrator Evans. Present via Teams: Cara Albert – Grafton County Bar Association, Sarah Lineberry, Brian Young – Bureau of Court Services

Commissioner Piper called the meeting to order at 1:00 PM

Commissioner Piper stated that they have been told that the courthouse building needs to be either replaced or renovated and they are looking for input as to where to begin the process.

CA Libby stated that the EH Danson study was completed a year and a half ago and they need to start moving forward to figure out a solution for the courthouse. They have an aging building that they have identified as having a number of issues. EH Danson gave options for a new building and options for renovation. It was determined that a new building could be put in the existing parking lot and then demolish the old courthouse after the construction is completed to eliminate the issue of offices being displaced. Building a new building makes the most sense, considering the cost of renovations and additions that are contained within the EH Danson report.

Supt. Oakes stated that since the EH Danson study was completed a year and a half ago the building is not getting any better. There are concerns about server rooms that are too hot. The server rooms started out as electrical rooms and were never intended for server rooms. He noted that the courts phone system is not on the generator as well as the sewer pumps. He stated that mechanically, it has been difficult to keep the occupants comfortable. Logistically doing a renovation would be a nightmare. Based on cost and logistics he is in favor a new building and the county has the space to do it. He stated a discussion needs to be had to figure out whether they are going to build for the state and the county or if they are going to build only for the county. He is currently unable to complete large projects at the courthouse pending this decision.

Director Andross stated that he represents the one (1) 24/7 occupant of the courthouse. They are the only ones in the building nights and weekends and struggle with the mechanical impacts Supt. Oakes referred to with keeping the occupants comfortable.

Sheriff Stiegler stated the building was a design flaw for 21st century court services. There are some serious security risks in the building. Risk management is an important job and Grafton County has one of the worst courthouses in the state in terms of Superior Court Security. The way the courthouse is connected with the DoC is good, but it is flawed in the sense that it originally had temporary holding areas in the Sheriff's Department. Over time, more space was needed for offices and record keeping and the inmates were then brought over by the Sheriff's Department. He explained that what can happen is the DoC can go into lockdown and the Judge has to wait because the DoC will not open its doors for anyone. He stated that there needs to be

temporary holding areas in the courthouse for inmates to be placed in while they wait for their hearings.

Atty. Hornick stated that the County Attorney's Office primary issue is the fact that there are twenty-two (22) employees and they are not within one (1) portion of the building. They are spread out in two (2) different sections as well as in the administration building. She also noted that there are safety concerns as well. Office Administrator Evans explained they have a very small bathroom, no kitchen or breakroom. C. Albert from the Grafton County Bar Association stated that the feedback from the Bar Association is the space is lacking. They do not have adequate space if they are at the courthouse for the day to prepare for trials.

S. Lineberry stated that they were not sure if any movement has been made on the county's end. She noted that she is different from the Administrative Office of the Courts, her office is the Bureau of Court Services, and they negotiate leases for courthouses. She stated that the state owns twenty-one (21) courthouses and leases seventeen (17). She explained that in terms of the state building the facilities, it goes through the capital budget process and requests go in twice a year. There is \$120 million for the entire state that is divided every two (2) years for all of their departments. S. Lineberry stated that looking at this size of a request is unrealistic because those funds are hard to get. When the state built the courthouse in Merrimack County, it was a ten (10) year process and cost roughly \$15 million. She stated that the Judicial Branch would agree with the current condition of the Grafton County Courthouse, but they have priorities all over the state and Grafton County is not the highest. The other option is leasing. S. Lineberry explained that by law they have to go through a competitive bidding process for leasing when moving to a new location.

Supt. Oakes stated that the county has received ARPA funds and asked if there are any of those funds at the state level to use for this project. S. Lineberry stated that the state did receive ARPA funds but most of it is earmarked already. She noted that she is not sure if GOFERR still has funds available, but the county could look into those. Sheriff Stiegler asked what would be the maximum lease that the state would agree to. S. Lineberry explained that any lease they enter into over five (5) years has to go through the Long-Range Planning and Utilization Committee before it goes to Governor and Council. They have many leases around 4-5 years, but they also have negotiated a ten (10) year lease in Hillsborough County.

S. Lineberry stated that if the county had a direction they were going in and wanted to give the state specifics they would listen. The state would need to put out an RFP. She stated that first round proposals would be submitted, noting that this would show that they are seeking multiple interested parties. Those proposals would go through a panel to determine which are viable and from those locations, they ask for information that is more specific. The RFP process could take a year, the Governor and Council process is six (6) weeks and then the Long-Range Committee; only meets three (3) times a year. CA Libby asked if the county had a five (5) year lease, would they have to go through that process. S. Lineberry stated that a five (5) year lease would only require an RFP because they would be changing locations, but it would not go through the Long-Range Committee. She went on to further explain that the state is not in a position to drive this project, but they want to listen. The capital budget route through the state is not a realistic one.

She will relay all of the information from today to the stakeholders and they could reconnect again. The group thanked S. Lineberry for her time.

S. Lineberry, B. Young and Cara Albert, left the meeting.

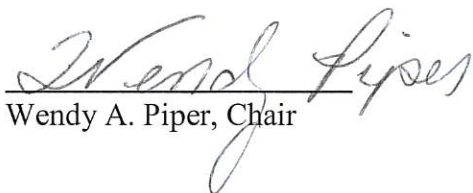
CA Libby stated that she knows that the physical location of the courthouse in North Haverhill might not be ideal but as far as prisoner transport and attorneys that are already on campus, logistically it makes sense. She stated that, in reality, she does not think the state will go anywhere. If the county were to build a new courthouse, the state would be happy to use it. The group discussed the alternative idea of having a new building that is for only county offices and where it could be located.

Director Andross stated that he understands the idea that they should take care of the county from a county employee standpoint, but he stated that from a taxpayer standpoint, the county has already made the investment to get to where they are in terms of the DoC and its connection to the courthouse. He believes they should go forward with a design with the court's needs included and consider them a long-range tenant. CA Libby stated that she agrees and thinks they should move forward with designing a building that includes the courts. She will start researching funding options.

The group will meet again beginning of December. Supt. Oakes stated that they should have departments look at what their needs showed in the study and decide what is realistic before the next meeting.

3:00 PM with no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,


Wendy A. Piper, Chair