

Commissioners' Journal
October 31, 2017

The Geauga County Board of Commissioners met for a work session with Richard L. Bowen and Associates on October 31, 2017 at 10:30 a.m. in the Commissioners' Chambers located at 470 Center Street in Chardon, Ohio.

It is declared and determined that all formal actions of the Board of County Commissioners concerning and relating to the adoption of all resolutions that were adopted in this meeting, and that all deliberations of the Board of County Commissioners that resulted in such formal action were open to the public and were in compliance with all legal requirements, including section 121.22 of the Ohio Revised Code.

President Ralph Spidalieri opened the work session at 10:43 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

In attendance: Commissioner Spidalieri, Commissioner Claypool, Commissioner Lennon, County Administrator David Lair, and Clerk Christine Blair.

From Richard L. Bowen and Associates was Kenneth Emling, AIA, NCARB.

The audience included Teresa Santin and Mark Wallach from Thacker, Robinson and Zinz, Law Director for the City of Chardon Jim Gillette, Jeff Smock, Vice Mayor, City of Chardon, John Mallen, City of Chardon Council, Randy Sharpe, City of Chardon and Steven Yaney from the Development and Zoning for the City of Chardon and Director of Administrative Services Linda Burhenne.

Topics of Discussion for today's meeting included:

Update (work completed over past 2 weeks)

Questionnaire responses to date

Departmental Interviews – Auditor, Health District, Commissioners' Office, Job and Family Services, Prosecutor, Planning Commission and ESC – Educational Service Center

Mr. Emling stated that they have continued to receive in and are close to closing out the questionnaires. He added they held several interviews in the last two weeks and they have gone well, he enjoyed the process of meeting everyone and has gotten a lot of good information. There was a brief discussion about the Youth Center, and the square footage will be included in the study.

2 week look-ahead (anticipated activities)

Completion of Questionnaire evaluation – Continue to develop the program

Completion of Departmental Interviews

Common Pleas Court Interview (November 10th)

Juvenile /Probate Court Interview (November 14th)

Mr. Emling explained that they are almost done with the interviews, they have spoken with Geauga Community Action which is just one small office, and they have not been able to talk with Ms. Thompson at the Law Library. Mr. Emling added that he is still working on getting an interview scheduled with the Treasurer. Mr. Emling explained that they take the information from the questionnaire and put it into the program and then after the interviews are completed, they will update that information. Mr. Emling is hoping to have the interview on the 14th to be the last one. Commissioner Claypool inquired about when they can schedule a review of what has been completed so far.

Overall Project Schedule update

Mr. Emling provided updated schedules that show November 17th as the date to have the report finalized and have it submitted to the website by the 20th. The review period will be from November 20th through 28th. Mr. Emling stated that the final report is expected to be completed by December 5th. There was discussion about getting a meeting or individual meetings scheduled with the Commissioners to review and discuss what has been completed and provide their view points and information. Commissioner Lennon expressed that this is an exercise for the Board to look at what is possible, not negative and what the future might be and what the options are.

Commissioners' Journal
October 31, 2017

Mr. Emling stated that the needs feasibility assessment will be done by the first week of December. Mr. Emling added that everyone that they had met with had been positive, showed the current space they are in, what their needs are and provided ideas. There was a discussion about the departments' square footage needs, and that none have said they need less space, but rather they could use some additional or maybe a different layout from their current one. Mr. Emling reminded the Board that a lot of the departments have common and shared areas that could allow for some efficiency if departments are combined or shared, but that will be shown in the program. Mr. Lennon inquired about utilities, old versus new (more efficient).

Mr. Claypool explained that he had been talking with the Judges and one expressed concerns over their current layout that included security and functionality. Mr. Claypool stated that people adapt to the current areas and asked if there was a metric to determine what is needed. Mr. Emling stated that it will be addressed and determined based on the interview and when the program is completed, additional information will be included with the metric portion of the document that will address the needs. He used the Courtroom as an example, citing the need to keep the public and prisoners separate from each other so they do not interface with each other.

Mr. Lennon mentioned Job and Family Services and proximity of the Youth Center, Ravenwood and the Sheriff's Office and the desire to be near each other just based on dynamics. Mr. Lennon added that this is just hypothetical; this is not the groundwork of the plan to get things done. He repeated he just hopes that everyone sees this as an opportunity and provides input, instead of feeling like this is the death of the City of Chardon and the County.

Mr. Emling brought up an example from an interview last week. At the Educational Services Center, right in the middle of the reception area, they do finger prints, instead of having it in a small corner or desk area that is not disruptive in the work space. Mr. Claypool mentioned the court and security and that he feels there needs to be more and that it is something that needs to be addressed. Mr. Emling added another example of having to drive back and forth to the Annex. Mr. Lennon inquired about duplication in staff, using receptionists as an example. Mr. Emling stated that currently the majority of the departments have them and in the big picture you could say that if a consolidation were to happen you could reduce 15 down to 4, adding that this again was just an example.

Chardon City Council member John Mallen stated that Judge Timothy Grendell had submitted a letter stating that the physical facilities for any of the courts should remain in the city and the reasons why. Mr. Claypool added that he had met with Judge Grendell last week and had a discussion about his court and he expressed many issues with the layout and concern about security.

Mr. Lennon asked Mr. Mallen if they have heard any ideas or any "What Ifs" for the future. Mr. Lennon stated that he felt this should be looked at as a positive and an opportunity of self-evaluation for the City. Do they want to have the square come to life at night or remain dependent upon Government? Mr. Lennon inquired about the Attorneys in the room. Law Director Jim Gillette stated that the Attorneys are here to look out for the City's best interest of maintaining the offices the Ohio Revised Code requires to remain in the City. Mr. Claypool asked is that the best judgement, to keep them in the City, but the opportunity in the future, 10, 20 or 30 years down the road to have a conversion about a robust downtown area with a business interest. Mr. Claypool stated that there is nothing to say that the current situation is the best for the future of the City of Chardon, so let's get together and talk about what could be, adding that the Board hired a company that could assist turning the City into something new, something refreshed and that the Board doesn't know where any of this will go, and that they want to have Chardon be included. There will be a cost but they don't know what that will entail, whether it is to maintain the current situation or to update what is there. He questioned whether that is the best for the residents of Geauga County and the City, adding that we don't know, and that it is a conversation that needs to had. Mr. Gillette asked if that was part of the study, how to best use the buildings if they vacate them. Mr. Claypool replied that it is not included in this part of the study, but they hired a company that can help do that for now, we are taking an inventory, understanding what we have, giving the example of a bathroom in one of the offices on the square. Mr. Lennon added that there was no plan on where they were going to put government, but financially is this going to carry us through the next thirty years. He noted the expenses of trying to maintain the current buildings and could show them the invoices.

Commissioners' Journal
October 31, 2017

Mr. Gillette stated that this was the second meeting he has been at and that at both meetings the Board has discussed the issue of selling the buildings on Main Street. Mr. Lennon and Mr. Claypool asked if anyone had said that. Mr. Gillette asked what they would be used for, to which Mr. Lennon stated that they didn't know, that they might be repurposed, and that was the reason why they hired a professional company to do the study. Mr. Lennon stated that right now they are looking at what the County owns and operates today and is it the best and will it carry us into the future. It is not about selling buildings and moving off the square. There are a lot of rumors out there and there is another big piece to this that doesn't involve Chardon. Mr. Gillette stated that was why they were here, in terms of the concern over what is in the best interest for the City of Chardon and what is statutorily required for the offices on the City square to remain within the City square. Mr. Lennon expressed that it is not necessary and that it is premature to have counsel, that this could have been a conversation with him and the City Council. Mr. Lennon stated that this could be a great thing for Geauga County and the City of Chardon.

Mr. Mallen expressed that it is premature for the City Council to sit down, negotiate, get on board or dig their heels in until the final product is seen and they can see what they can do to make it work. As the Law Director stated, there are offices that are required to remain in the City of Chardon. Mr. Lair added that the County has plenty of space to keep them in the City of Chardon. Mr. Lennon stated that there is a lot going on, it involves a lot of pieces, what is best for Chardon, what's best for the County, businesses, employees and that he is surprised by such a negative vibe that is being conveyed today. Right now they are receiving hard data that they can base decisions on, that his door is always open, and that he had hoped that it would be more of collaboration. Vice Mayor Jeff Smock explained that they are doing their due diligence, that they hired counsel who is here listening and observing and if, at some point, they have to ask them to do something or engage, they have been here.

Mr. Claypool asked them to keep the relationship positive, that at some point the information gathered and the data collected will come into clarity and at that point they can start to look at decisions.

There was brief discussion about the many hypothetical ideas that have been thrown out there, about how they can afford to do things, which is a basis for decisions to be made, does it fit within the budget? Commissioner Spidalieri added that he had hoped the City of Chardon could provide information on the experience from their move to the new building, the good reasons and the bad reasons for the move. Emotions can run high when rumors are taken a certain way, and he tries to keep a positive mindset that all of them can work together. Mr. Spidalieri stated that they haven't discussed selling buildings that they don't even have the appraisals on them, and by law they have to follow the ORC in regards to the offices that must remain in the County Seat. It's important for business to succeed, it creates jobs, taxes are being paid, and people conduct business locally. Mr. Spidalieri stated that the work sessions are being held to be transparent and appreciate the City of Chardon being here, and what they are hearing is the same thing the Board hears. Good people come together for the right reasons to make the right decisions, noting that a lot has changed in the last thirty years, citing security and current court cases that warrant change. The City's feedback is important, and they want to hear what people have to say.

Mr. Claypool added that it is important to have a good relationship with the City of Chardon and everyone else in the County.

Steve Yaney from the City of Chardon expressed that he hoped that the minutes from the interview that was held aren't taken as a negative that they had many factors that were included and a lot of concerns were expressed. We truly care for Chardon and the future there, hope that going forward it remains positive. Mr. Lennon stated that they all want to see Chardon succeed but at the same time we have to look at what is best for the County, that if you think about all the money that has been spent to date doing maintenance and repairs that could have gone toward a new facility, where we might be. Mr. Yaney stated that as a zoning and planner person, he wants to look at the change for the future but also has to plan for the worst case scenario in those "what ifs". Mr. Lennon added that this is the beginning of a long conversation or it could come back that we are perfect and don't have to do anything, but we will have to wait and see.

Commissioners' Journal
October 31, 2017

BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD

Motion: *by Commissioner Lennon to adjourn the meeting at 11:47 a.m.*

Geauga County Board of Commissioners

Ralph Spidalieri

Walter M. Claypool

Timothy C. Lennon

Christine Blair, Commissioners' Clerk

Commissioners' Journal
October 31, 2017

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