

STATEMENT TO COMMISSIONERS

2019 05 20

Kathi Thompson

I want to start by saying I understand that the sitting group of Commissioners has inherited issues that have compounded over at least 30 years. The Commissioners and Council had an opportunity in 2016 to act on a plan that was put together, including costs, to significantly alter Courthouse offices.

There are conflicting reports about this. Some say the citizens didn't want it at all; others say citizens wanted a scaled down plan. Regardless of what the citizens wanted, the Council refused to approve funding, the Commissioners refused to proceed with a referendum, and the plan died.

At the same time, maintenance issues continued to be an issue, and critical problems were left unaddressed.

Fast forward to today.

1. In 2018, the Commissioners hired an architectural firm to draw up a plan that included adding onto the Justice Center and demolishing the Courthouse. Hard costs were not included with that proposal. This plan was created and presented without prior discussion at a public meeting, including discussion with the Council.
2. Last week, another plan was presented that had every office moving out of the Courthouse. With this plan, the Courthouse would remain vacant. A county-owned historic building. Vacant and – left to rot? – in the town square.
3. Last week, we also heard from Indiana Landmarks, who, with their own funds, will hire an architect and develop a plan that includes Courthouse renovation.

We owe it to the community to choose the right plan, not the least expensive, for ease of access to government programs and for future generations.

We owe it to the community to present all feasible options, including time estimates and legitimate cost information. We can do this through two or three community meetings, giving interested parties time to review the plans and give comments.

The fact is, no matter what we do, we will have to spend millions of dollars.

INDIANA LANDMARKS...

The plan from Indiana Landmarks will come with cost and time estimates. At this time, we cannot speculate what that plan will include. Indiana Landmarks anticipates conversations with the users, public and leadership to get a well-rounded picture of the desires and needs.

ADD TO THE JUSTICE CENTER AND DEMOLISH THE COURTHOUSE...

If you want to go back to the plan from December, hard cost and time estimates must be included, which means involving the architect yet again. You may have hard costs, but the public only heard numbers with – upon questioning at a public meeting – no information about how those numbers were derived.

MOVE EVERYONE OUT AND LEAVE THE COURTHOUSE VACANT...

If you want to proceed with a plan to move all the offices out, you will need to hire yet another architect for the costs. If done properly, this will require – likely – another \$30,000-\$50,000. The architect will need to consider:

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- Highway Garage:
 - The construction of offices that meet square footage needs and traffic from one office to the others.
 - Permanent office construction, with permanent walls rather than cubicles.
 - Construction of fireproof and secure vaults for all of the offices, including those with historic records.
 - Meeting rooms.
 - Additional restrooms.
 - Access to internet and utilities.
 - Fixing the current roof, at the very least, with possibly other issues that require attention.
 - In short, it will be like constructing a new building on top of and in and around an old building.
- Annex:
 - If the Surveyor stays there, secure parking for trucks carrying chemicals, especially since they will be next to the river.
 - If the Surveyor stays there, a secure and fireproof vault for her use.
 - Assure that the current lift will meet accessibility requirements.
- Justice Center:
 - Costs of adding onto the building, either to one side or to add a floor. If adding a floor, a structural study will need to be completed.
 - Plans for not only Circuit Court, another jury room, meeting rooms for attorneys, the clerk's office, including election activity, the Prosecutor and the Probation Department.
 - NOTE: It would be a shame to lose the basement to offices, when it could be used for an income-producing work release program to benefit the community.
- Courthouse
 - The plan should expound on the costs, both monetary and aesthetic, of letting the Courthouse lie empty, perhaps projecting those costs over a period of 10 years. At some point, resolution of that empty building will be required, so perhaps the architect can give cost figures for eventual demolition.

In short, "just moving offices out" will not lead to lower cost outlay.

PARKING...

A parking lot may be available in the rubble of a burned down building just a block from the Courthouse. Something to consider.

I REPEAT...

I repeat, we owe it to the citizens of this community to present these plans at public meetings, allowing the opportunity for everyone to weigh in. The Landmark plan will include legitimate cost estimates. The other plans (both of them, or either of them) have to have real costs associated, derived from licensed architects, in order for the public to get a true picture. If costs are derived by any other method, those persons supplying the estimates and how they were arrived upon will have to be included.

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IN THE MEANTIME...

In the meantime, we need to deal with the temporary relocation of both the Surveyor and the Assessor. And I said temporary.

The Surveyor was told her move would be permanent, but the plan to move her to the Annex did not even contemplate her need for the vault. She was told the basement of the Courthouse would now be used for storage. It seemed, in that conversation, that it is possible any attempt to renovate the Courthouse will be sabotaged in one way or another. I sincerely hope that is not the case and that you intend to proceed in a thoughtful manner, involving the public in the decisions.

Lastly, the Assessor needs to be close to other Courthouse offices. She is comfortable with a move to the Commissioners' meeting room. Keeping the Assessor in this building while we work through all other options seems to be more important than hanging on to a meeting room. We can hold meetings in countless locations.