

**WASHOE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
AND
CITY OF RENO CITY COUNCIL**

JOINT MEETING

TUESDAY

9:00 A.M.

FEBRUARY 8, 2000

PRESENT:

WASHOE COUNTY

Ted Short, Chairman

Jim Shaw, Vice Chairman

Joanne Bond, Commissioner

Jim Galloway, Commissioner

Pete Sferrazza, Commissioner

Katy Singlaub, County Manager

Paul Lipparelli, Deputy District Attorney

Amy Harvey, County Clerk

CITY OF RENO

Jeff Griffin, Mayor

Dave Aiazzi, Councilmember

Sherrie Doyle, Councilmember

Pierre Hascheff, Councilmember

Tom Herndon, Councilmember

Dave Rigdon, Councilmember

Charles McNeely, City Manager

Patricia Lynch, Reno City Attorney

Don Cook, City Clerk

ABSENT:

Bill Newburg, Councilmember

The Washoe County Board of County Commissioners and the City of Reno City Council met in a special joint session in the Commission Chambers of the Washoe County Administration Complex, 1001 East Ninth Street, Reno, Nevada. Following the pledge of allegiance to the flag of our Country, the Clerks called the rolls for their respective entities and the Board and Council conducted the following business:

AGENDA

In accordance with the Open Meeting Law, on motion by Commissioner Bond, seconded by Councilmember Aiazzi, which motion duly carried, Chairman Short ordered that the agenda for the February 8, 2000, joint meeting be approved.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There was no response to the call for public comments.

00-98 DISCUSSION REGARDING JOINT COURT FACILITIES - RENO MUNICIPAL COURT AND WASHOE COUNTY COURTS

A. Update from City of Reno - Municipal Court and Civic Center Project

Steve Varela, City of Reno Director of Public Works, stated that, for a number of years, the City of Reno has been looking at a Civic Center which would include new facilities for Municipal Court, the Police Department, and administration for the City of Reno; that they issued a Request for Proposals and Qualifications and asked that developers submit proposed sites; that the proposals received have been narrowed to three potential sites; and that the Council has decided to go forward with the project in two phases, with the Municipal Court facilities being the first phase. The sites were displayed on the overhead projector and Mr. Varela described the locations stating that the first site is the current City Hall with expansion either to the east or south; that the second site is property owned by Ng/Dobbler located south of the Holiday Hotel, behind the Pioneer Theater; and that the third site is the Pioneer Inn site. He stated that Council has directed him to go back and examine the three sites from the 2-phase approach; that they hope to start construction on Phase I, the Municipal Court, by the end of this year or early 2001; that he has been given a budget of \$6,000,000; and that they plan to do the Civic Center phase in the next 3 to 5 years. Mr. Varela stated that he is still gathering data on land and construction costs, as well as the costs/savings of a combined court facility, and will be presenting more information to the Council on February 22, 2000; that he has met with the property owners of both the Pioneer Inn and Ng sites; and that it appears there is a lot of potential for development on either of the sites.

Commissioner Sferrazza asked what the cost is for each of the sites. Mr. Varela stated that they have a good idea from the market value figures, but they haven't talked price directly with the property owners. In response to Commissioner Bond, Mr. Varela stated that there have been no appraisals, but based on their Property Manager's estimates, the Ng/Dobbler site appears to be approximately \$20-\$25 per square foot, the sites adjacent to the current City Hall are about the same, and he does not have a market value for the Pioneer Inn site at this time. He also stated that he wants to be clear that staff has not talked to the property owners concerning their asking prices and that may be much different than the market value.

B. Update from Washoe County - Courts Project

Dave Roundtree, Public Works Director, reported that an update of the County's Courts Master Plan was completed last year; that the update pointed out several problems with the current court facilities, such as public exposure to risk in that there is no way to separate victims, witnesses, attorneys, and defendants in the public hallways; that security at the existing facilities is a problem; that there is a need for better public accommodation as people very often end up at the 1 South Sierra courthouse when they need to be in the old Courthouse and vice-versa; that the old Courthouse is not ADA compliant in some of the public areas; and that the current system requires that court records be transported back and forth across Sierra Street between the two buildings, which presents hazards to the employees. He further stated that a critical problem that has been identified is the fact that the District Attorney's office is spread out in four different locations and is in desperate need of additional space. Mr. Roundtree stated that as a result of the study, staff was directed by the Commission to issue a Request for Proposals for the identification of vacant land and/or land with existing buildings that might be remodeled to accommodate the County's near-term needs; that the RFP specifications included that the property be within a 2-block radius of the existing court complex and a minimum of 2 acres in size; and that three responses were received to the RFP which staff is reviewing now and will be bringing a recommendation to the Board next week. He described the proposed sites as follows: one on Mill Street immediately east of the automobile museum, which is much farther out than the 2-block radius, one is a 1.72-acre parcel just east of Sinclair Street, which is slightly smaller than the minimum requested and just outside of the anticipated outer perimeter, and the third proposal is the Pioneer Inn property, which includes four parcels of land totaling 3.88 acres; and stated that staff is considering the Mill Street and Sinclair sites as non-responsive bids because they do not meet the location and/or size specifications of the RFP.

Mr. Roundtree advised that the foremost concern is addressing the immediate needs of the District Attorney's office in the context of the overall master plan considering both the courts' functions and the court support functions out to the year 2020; that the master plan indicates that available space needs to be increased by approximately 50 percent between now and 2020; and that this can be approached on an incremental basis with the first increment being to identify and acquire the space.

In response to Commissioner Bond's question concerning the price tag on the Pioneer Inn, Mr. Roundtree stated that their proposal did include an asking price, but the County is precluded from paying more than the appraised value of any property; that the approximate value of the four parcels with the buildings is \$22-million; and that a full-fledged appraisal would be required before a final price could be determined.

Councilmember Rigdon asked what the County is planning to do with the Family Court building. Mr. Roundtree stated that another thing that came out of the study was the need to bring the District Courts back together, and Family Court is a part of the District Court; and that another option in that regard is to construct another building on that same block and/or build on to the existing Family/Justice Court building. In response to Councilmember Herndon, Mr. Roundtree stated that 4 floors could be added to the existing facility, although it would be a difficult construction project; that including parking under a court structure is not a good idea; and that perhaps public parking could be under other structures. Councilmember Herndon noted that parking downtown is a major problem and any projects would have to address parking. Katy Singlaub, County Manager, advised that the direction to the consultants who updated the courts master plan was to use existing County property and that, under any scenario, the County would need additional land for parking.

Commissioner Sferrazza asked why the County is limiting the scope of the RFP to a 2-block radius of the existing Courthouse. Mr. Roundtree stated that it is an operational issue as the District Attorney and the Public Defender need to be in close proximity to the courts. Ms. Singlaub added that the County made a commitment to stay downtown.

Commissioner Sferrazza also asked why the Family Court records cannot be relocated to the Family Court instead of clerks having to take files back and forth across the street.

Janet Berry, Chief Judge of the Second Judicial District Court, advised that there was not enough funding to create a Family Court filing office and further that the third floor of the building, which is where Family Court is located, structurally lacks the ability to hold the weight of the files. Judge Jim Hardesty stated that the current court system is the most inefficient system anyone has ever seen; that Family Court files represent 50 percent of the District Court files; that a recent report found that those files total 96,000 pounds; and that if those files were put on the third floor of the new courthouse, they would soon end up on the first floor, so they have to be transported back and forth between the old Courthouse and the new Courthouse. Judge Hardesty added that recent estimates are that this alone is costing the taxpayers over \$120,000 annually.

Judge Scott Jordan, presiding Judge of the Family Division of the District Court, stated that the issue of the files was not something that was overlooked; that the Board at that time did not want to do a bond issue for the new courthouse, so there was a cap; that the original plan was to build a 2-story building; and that even though it was re-designed to 3 stories, all the users recognized from the beginning that there would be minimal ability to meet the needs of the users and no ability to grow, and they knew they would have to be carrying files back and forth.

Commissioner Sferrazza asked if there was any reason the Family Court system, including the files, could not be relocated to the new Juvenile Detention facility. Judge Jordan stated that there are currently hearings going on all day, every day, at Wittenberg Hall and the courtrooms in the new juvenile detention facility are for Juvenile Court hearings. He added that they have discussed moving the entire Family Court; that they do feel very strongly that that would be counter-productive; and that they believe it is important to bring the entire District Courts back together in order to promote justice within the Court. Judge Hardesty advised that the filings in the Family Court have increased by 236 percent; that the National Center study currently being conducted is probably going to tell the Commission that additional Family Courts and judges are going to be needed in the not-too-distant future; that the alternative to adding more courts and judges is to use the general jurisdiction judges for backup to handle the Family Court overflow; and that that would not be possible if the two divisions of District Court were physically separated.

Councilmember Doyle asked Mr. Roundtree if it was true that the Pioneer Inn site is the County's choice of location. Mr. Roundtree stated that that site does have the best proximity to current facilities and that it is the only site that has been proposed that appears to be responsive to the RFP. Councilmember Doyle asked if the staffs have been working together or have the entities been going separate ways. Mr. Roundtree stated that in the County's RFP they did identify the potential for accommodating Reno's Municipal Court function and the City Attorney function as well. Councilmember Doyle stated that the information she received was that the County would be glad to pencil-in the Municipal Court somewhere and asked if Reno was just going to get a little corner somewhere. Mr. Roundtree responded that if everybody's needs can be accommodated together, then everybody comes out ahead.

Councilmember Doyle stated that she had been contacted by the MarkeTec survey asking her about flood control, courts, etc., and asked if the County had the results of the survey yet. Ms. Singlaub advised that the survey is being conducted over the next several weeks; that they are randomly surveying both City and County residents; and that the results should be presented to the Board in early March.

Councilmember Doyle asked if there was anyone present associated with the Pioneer Inn proposal who could answer questions about their price. She stated that there are two potential sites at \$20-\$25/foot and the Pioneer Inn is at \$129/foot. Tom Gallagher responded to her questions stating that the price proposed to the County is the value of the site with the on-going business and everything that is there now; that it is the most logical place for the courts to expand; that the group should look at the square foot price of office space rather than land; that the master plan buildout they proposed to the County was for 600,000 square feet of office space; and that an independent appraisal will be required, which has not been done yet.

Councilmember Hascheff stated that timing and cost are the two most important issues to him and that the City's Municipal Court needs are critical. He asked Mr. Roundtree about the County's timetable and also about incorporating shared savings into a consolidated facility. Chairman Short reviewed figures developed by staff for preliminary estimated costs savings if the Reno Justice Court and Reno Municipal Court were co-located totaling \$322,632 annually with the major savings being in prisoner transports and court security. Ms. Singlaub added that both staffs met last week and this is their best estimate of operational costs that could be saved in the Justice Court.

Mr. Roundtree stated that a cost-benefit analysis would be performed and could probably be done in the next 30-45 days; that the timing and options the County has are fairly limited; that if the Board directed staff to pursue the Pioneer Inn site and if, in fact, the County was able to acquire it, the prudent thing to do at that point would be for the City and County to jointly master plan that site to determine how the District Courts, the Justice Court, the Municipal Court, and all the support services would integrate; and that once that was accomplished, Reno could identify a specific site for the Municipal Court, begin their construction immediately, and proceed on their own schedule. He further stated that the County does not have the ability, at this point, to fund construction; that there is no financing in place for construction; that the Board will have to consider whether to put the issue on the November ballot; and that acquisition of property is a critical first step.

Commissioner Bond expressed that both the County and the City need to work together and move as fast as possible on this. Mr. Roundtree stated that he and Mr. Varela have been working together; that Reno has a timeline they feel they must meet and the County has been very sensitive to that; and that he believes if the Pioneer Inn site can be acquired and a joint master planning effort is accomplished, that would not prolong Reno's process and would not hinder their timely development of a new Municipal Court site.

Councilmember Rigdon stated that the Council was very clear in directing Reno staff that they would not seek any tax increase or bond issue in order to build the Municipal Court; that they have been putting funds aside in their budget to be able to do this without asking the taxpayers for money; and that he doesn't want the Reno Municipal Courts tied to any kind of a bond issue or tax increase. Mr. Roundtree stated that the County is not suggesting that; that the County has the resources to acquire the property; that once the property is acquired, Reno could finance and build its facility; and that would not be tied to any future bond issue. He further stated that the future bond issue consideration is for the development of the County's facilities. Councilmember Rigdon stated that their budget figure is \$6,000,000 and asked if the land would be leased to the City or how that would be worked out. Mr. Roundtree responded that that really hasn't been discussed in detail and a lease arrangement would be one of the options that could be pursued.

Councilmember Aiazzi asked if four floors could really be added to the existing court building when it can't hold the files. Mr. Roundtree responded that they can add on to the existing building; that the floor storage is a separate issue in that the floors were designed to be for courtroom use, not for bulk storage; and that the upper floors could be designed to accommodate files and that kind of storage.

Councilmember Aiazzi asked if the Pioneer Inn site includes the whole block. Mr. Roundtree stated that the entire block was proposed, but there is one parcel on the south end, where the Nevada State Bank is located, which is subject to a continuing lease that runs for another 12 years, so that portion would not be immediately available. He further stated that the remainder of the property would be adequate to meet the needs that have been identified. Councilmember Aiazzi stated that a 12-year span would include the phasing in of the portions; and Mr. Roundtree stated that could very well be the case.

Councilmember Aiazzi noted that the Ng/Dobbler property is within the County's 2-block radius and asked how much money the County has for site acquisition. Ms. Singlaub reported that current debt is being restructured so that the County would have the ability to finance up to approximately \$15-million, but that the Ng/Dobbler site was not proposed to the County through the RFP process.

Commissioner Galloway asked if staff has any ideas yet regarding how much of the built space at the Pioneer Inn could be used and how much would have to be replaced and/or remodeled. Mr. Roundtree answered that there have been some preliminary discussions; that it has been suggested that the building on the corner of Virginia and Court could be remodeled to meet the District Attorney's needs; that the master planning effort really needs to be done first; and that there is a possibility that some of the facilities could be used in the interim.

Councilmember Doyle stated that her recollection is not the same as Councilmember Rigdon's in that she does remember talking about property taxes for the whole civic center facility. She stated that Reno is running out of time and that serious discussions need to begin; that courts, flood control, juvenile facilities, etc., have all been talked about, but no one has talked about the Reno Police Department, which is also in critical need of additional space; and that she would like to have another joint meeting as soon as possible where staff can provide more definitive answers, especially concerning costs, and to decide whether all of this should be put on the ballot.

Councilmember Herndon asked if these facilities have to remain in the downtown area. Chairman Short stated that with what the County already has downtown, it is pretty much committed. Commissioner Galloway stated that all of the attorneys and many other people who use the courts facilities are located downtown and that, if Reno wants to have anything left downtown, they should keep the courts downtown as well.

C. Discussion/Action Regarding Joint Court Facilities

Councilmember Aiazzi expressed his hope that everybody consider strongly the Ng/Tobbler site; that if the land can be acquired quickly and the joint master plan worked out, Reno could move forward with the Municipal Court; and that they are going to do this without a vote of the people. He further stated that the cost savings discussed earlier would be the same no matter which site is chosen.

Commissioner Shaw stated that he concurs with Councilmember Doyle about having another joint meeting; and that he feels this meeting has been a really good start, but the Boards need the facts and figures to make the best decision in working together.

Councilmember Doyle stated that the fact that this will be a bond issue needs to be discussed because that was never decided at the Reno Council; that if the County does put a bond issue before the voters, they will be asking 55 percent of the voters to fund a County project with nothing in there to benefit the City of Reno; and that she would like to see any bond issue include enough for the Reno Police Department.

Councilmember Rigdon stated that the only staff direction he would be comfortable with is to get a Municipal Court as cheaply and quickly as

they can; that he is not interested in going out for bonds or raising taxes; and that if the County can get the land and there is something that can be done jointly, that would be fine with him as long as the Municipal Court is not tied to any bond issue or any kind of prolonged time line by the County.

Commissioner Bond stated that a bond issue is not just to benefit Washoe County. Councilmember Doyle stated that that was not her argument, but when you look at the tax base and the voter percentage, it would be coming out of the City of Reno. She further stated that she takes great offense at the suggestion that a "cheap" municipal court should be built.

Chairman Short stated that the County has not made any definite decisions about bond issues. He also concurred with other statements concerning the two staffs working together on this.

Ms. Singlaub stated that 4 to 6 weeks would be a better timeframe for another joint meeting as that would give staff the time needed to do all the analyses and provide more definitive information for the Board.

Judge Hickman, Reno Municipal Court, speaking on behalf of the Reno Municipal Court Judges, stated that getting new Municipal Court facilities is critical; that they are currently in a trailer out in the street and are out of compliance with the law; that they do not have separate victim-witness waiting areas; that they need more courtrooms; that victims, witnesses and defendants all have to ride in the same elevator and sit in the same hallway; and that the judges feel that anything that delays construction is unacceptable. The Judge further stated that they are leery of a project that is contingent upon a bond issue passing and that it would not make a lot of sense to acquire the land, build the municipal court facilities, and then have to wait on a bond issue, which might not even happen, to construct the rest of the facilities.

Richard Gammick, Washoe County District Attorney, stated that one thing no one has mentioned is the person standing on the sidewalk with a citation in hand asking where he's supposed to be and courthouse personnel trying to explain to him where Reno Municipal Court is located, or the people who sometimes have to go back and forth between the two courthouses, going through security each time, sometimes with children in tow. He further stated that these are the people who are supposed to be served and that sometimes the service is not great. Mr. Gammick added that if the District Attorney can be moved out of leased space, \$288,000 a year could be saved and that a lot of time and money could be saved if all the prosecutors, City and County, were going to one courts complex.

Charles McNeely, Reno City Manager, agreed that 4 to 6 weeks would be a good timeframe for another joint meeting and stated that in the meantime they will continue to do their analysis of the three sites that have been proposed to them; that co-location is still a priority of the Council and they will continue to work with County staff; and that Council did make it clear to staff that they wanted to move forward on a Municipal Court very quickly, capped at \$6,000,000, and that did not include a ballot measure.

Councilmember Herndon stated that staff should be pretty clear on their direction and moved that the two Boards meet again on March 21, 2000, at 9:00 a.m. Councilmember Doyle seconded the motion.

Councilmember Aiazzi stated that he would like to know if the County is willing to look at the other sites; that the City is currently looking at three sites and the County is looking at one site; and that if not, then a lot of time could be saved by concentrating on the one site. Commissioner Sferrazza stated that he thinks the site east of the automobile museum should be analyzed as well; and that even though it is a

little beyond the two blocks, that site seems attractive to him. Commissioner Bond stated that she is willing to look at whatever staff brings her. Commissioner Galloway stated that he has no problem looking at the Ng/Dobbler site, but he believes the real question is whether or not that site is available; and that he is not interested in looking at the site east of the auto museum as that would be counterproductive as it is too far away.

Sheriff Richard Kirkland stated that the problems Judge Hickman discussed occur in all the other courts as well, which is why it is to everyone's benefit to work together to consolidate the courts; that initial cost is a big consideration, but it really needs to be examined as a total, long-term package; and that there has been a history of making decisions too quickly in this valley. In response to Councilmember Doyle, the Sheriff stated that it needs to be clearly understood that every citizen of Reno is in the County and that every citizen in Reno uses the Justice Court, the District Court, the Municipal Court, the District Attorney's office, the Public Defender's Office, the Sheriff's office, and the Police Department, so that should not be an issue. He reiterated emphatically that this really needs to be looked at and planned out carefully; and that it is important that everyone not get into so much of a hurry trying to meet very real immediate needs that we end up with something like the new Reno Justice Court which was built too quickly, wasn't planned right, and is an embarrassment to the County.

In response to Commissioner Galloway, Sheriff Kirkland stated that right now the Sheriff's Office is moving 10,000-13,000 inmates a year; that they are using 12-passenger vans, are in the process of acquiring 25-passenger vehicles, and will probably soon have to go to a bus; that those inmates have to be taken to Sparks Municipal Court, Sparks Justice Court, Reno Justice Court, District Court, and Reno Municipal Court as well as a smattering of other smaller courts; that food, medical care, etc., has to be provided while the inmates are out of the jail; that to maximize savings all the inmates should be taken to one location with a feeder system to get them to the other courts; that under law, the Sheriff is not required to transport all those inmates, only the ones to District and Justice courts; and that they will continue to move inmates to the Municipal Courts as well because the County considers 55 percent of the folks in the City as their folks, too.

Mr. Gammick stated that the property east of the automobile museum is getting too far away, and going too far away defeats the whole purpose.

Judge Hardesty stated that the way the two bodies have joined together to solve a very important problem is impressive; that he feels it would be important for the judiciary to join together with everyone also and do what they can to help in this process; that the judges have talked about a unified court system; and that the savings that could be realized by not having multiple court administrators, multiple filing locations and multiple support systems are huge. He added that the average citizen doesn't care which judge he sees and just wants to know where the judge is that he's supposed to see. The Judge advised that there are examples of unified court systems in other places in the country that staff could check into; that in Modesto, California, there is one cashier cage that the citizen goes to; and that Las Vegas has had both success and problems that we could learn from in their court system.

Mayor Griffin stated that a lot of information has been presented today and this is an opportunity to provide a real economy of scale to the taxpayer; that he is very encouraged by what he has heard today; and that he thinks this can move forward to provide good value to the taxpayer and good justice to people involved in the system.

Councilmember Doyle suggested that, before the next meeting, the staffs and Board members visit each other's courts to get a better

understanding of each other's needs. Chairman Short stated that that was an excellent suggestion and he invited city staff to visit the County courts, the District Attorney's office, the Sheriff's office, etc. He also stated that the Sheriff is correct in that we should be looking at this over the next 50 years and not just for the next 5 years.

Chairman Short then called for the vote on the motion that the bodies convene jointly again on Tuesday, March 21, 2000, at 9:00 a.m., in the County Commission chambers, at which time the staffs will have more information concerning the proposed sites and more definitive answers as to plans, costs, savings, time schedules, etc. The motion carried unanimously by both bodies.

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There being no further business to come before the Boards, the meeting adjourned at 10:50 a.m.

TED F. SHORT, Chairman

Washoe County Commission

ATTEST: AMY HARVEY, County Clerk

JEFF GRIFFIN, Mayor

City of Reno

ATTEST: DON COOK, City Clerk
