

Agenda Item Report



Winnebago County
The Wave of the Future

DATE: March 30, 2022

FROM: Mike Elder

RE: *NAME OF ITEM ON THE AGENDA*

General Description:

The Evidence Garage Capital Project at the Jail complex, previously approved, has begun the design phase. As a result of the schematic design and needs review, it has become apparent that the County requires a morgue space in addition to evidence storage.

Action Requested:

Approval of an expanded capital project and additional funding.

Procedural Steps:

(Show each level of committee and board approval needed, with meeting dates.)

Committee of Jurisdiction _Facilities_____ Meeting date: 4/13/2022

Action taken: _____ Passed _____ Vote: 4/0/1

Other Committee: _____ Meeting date: _____

Action taken: _____ Vote: _____

County Board Meeting date: _____

Background:

In April of 2021, a capital project was approved for the design and construction of a cold storage building on the Sheriff's Office Complex site for the storage of long-term evidence. A design firm was solicited and hired. In late summer and fall the design phase was begun. Concurrently the Covid pandemic experienced a surge and drug overdoses had a high level of fatalities. Deaths from Covid and other causes overwhelmed the available holding space in local funeral homes. Additionally, several of the decedents were considered evidence. The Coroner was forced to exercise their emergency cold storage plan, only to find that promised space was not available. This resulted in the Coroner having to local a trailer that could be used as cold storage for the decedents. This was a borrowed morgue trailer form a County several hours away. It was loaned to Winnebago County for a limited time. As it was there was a large vehicular accident and the trailer was recalled earlier than anticipated.

This incident provided an insight into the need for a redefinition of evidence. Now and in the coming future the need for cold storage for decedents will grow. The emergency cold storage options that are in place are not as secure as was planned. Having decedents placed in multiple privately-owned locations limits the Coroner's access to process them and to maintain the evidentiary chain of custody.

The design phase of the Evidence Storage Building is a good place to incorporate a morgue for the County. Additionally, the Coroner's Office could be located at the same facility, maximizing the efficiency of operations for the Coroner. A schematic design and preliminary opinion of probable cost was developed. The building footprint is expanded to provide 12 cold storage units and office and work

space for the Coroner. The size of the building has increased from approximately 2500 square feet of storage space with only lighting to a space of approximately 5300 square feet with lighting, ventilation and plumbing. The new opinion of probable cost is \$1,830,080. Previously, \$305,500 was approved for the original scope of the project. This leaves a shortfall of \$1,524,580 needed for the revised scope.

Policy Discussion:

The Sheriff, by State statute (many chapters; 59, 66, 301 and more) is responsible for gathering and safeguarding evidence related to the performance of his law enforcement responsibilities. Since the Sheriff's Office complex was built, the need for evidence storage has grown. There have been instances when the articles of evidence were too large to be stored in the current spaces. Additionally, there are items of evidence that the Sheriff must hold and safeguard until there is no further possibility of adjudication or appeal. This can stretch for years. This has caused the space that was envisioned in the year 2000 to be no longer sufficient for the storage needs now.

The Coroner, by State statute (many chapters; 59, 157, 979 and more) is responsible for investigating deaths in regards to whether any criminal activity has caused the death. The Coroner needs a space to be able to examine decedents and secure any evidence of the criminal activity. During the last year the Coroner was hard pressed to find space for decedents for both storage and examination.

The Facilities Committee referred the project for review and approval to the Judiciary Committee.

Attachments:

Attachment 1: Revised Capital Project Request

Attachment 2: Budget Transfer Request

Attachment 3: Draft Resolution