

Cherokee County Board of Commissioners
Armory Worksession
February 22, 2021
6:30 p.m.
Penland Senior Center

Members present: Dr. Dan Eichenbaum, Chairman; Jan Griggs, Vice-Chairman; Cal Stiles, member; Randy Phillips, member; and Gary Westmoreland, member.

Staff present: Randy Wiggins, County Manager; Maria Hass, Assistant County Manager/Clerk to the Board; Candy Anderson, Finance Director; and, Darryl Brown, County Attorney.

Also present: WKRC Radio, Local TV4 and Cherokee Scout.

Call to order and ethics statement by Chairman.

Invocation and Pledge

Modification of Agenda

Motion made by Commissioner Stiles to add a closed session to the end of the meeting, pursuant to §143-318.11(a) (3), to consult with the county attorney. Motion seconded by Commissioner Phillips. Motion passed unanimously.

Armory Discussion

Commissioner Phillips shared a proposal from Cherokee County Schools (CCS) proposing the county give the armory to CCS in exchange for Central Office now, and Murphy Elementary School in 10-15 years when it becomes available. The proposal included the county providing CCS with \$500,000 for renovations. He said CCS could then relocate central office staff, bus garage, maintenance, and food storage to the armory. Commissioner Phillips then proposed moving the county Veteran's Service Office and the Board of Elections to the Central Office location. He said it would allow more parking for the Board of Elections and the county could also add a drive-thru for one-stop voting.

Commissioner Griggs wanted to know how many CCS employees are at central office that would move to armory. Commissioner Phillips said there are 13-14 employees at the central office building, but said there are central offices employees located in several different places around county.

Commissioner Stiles said he felt like the highest and best use option for the armory, is to sell it. He said the board could then put the proceeds from the sale toward constructing a county office building on the county's property by the sheriff's office. He said this would allow for all county offices to be in one location. He said his other thought is that if the board is going to make the property exchange that they put the central office building on the market, and use the proceeds from the sale to go toward a new county office building. He shared personal knowledge of some of the challenges of renovating central office and said it would be very expensive to make external renovations. Concerning Murphy Elementary School, he said it is unknown when in the

future that the building would be available, and as it ages it will become more expensive to renovate or to clear the property. He said he would like to think about doing something "in the here and now" and start moving toward building in one location. He said county offices are currently scattered. He would like to see everything in one location to make it more convenient. He said people are currently being sent to multiple locations for county services.

Commissioner Westmoreland said Commissioner Phillips proposal for the armory for CCS would eliminate the \$400,000 from the schools budget request for a new bus garage and food storage. Commissioner Stiles said that if the county spends \$500,000 to renovate the armory, as proposed by CCS, that it would actually be an additional \$100,000 cost for the county. Commissioner Phillips talked about the recent updates that have been made to the central office building that would save the county some money. Commissioner Stiles said that it is already difficult to find a parking spot at central office, and that it would be even more difficult during an election with early voting. Commissioner Phillips said that with a little work at the back of the building that employees could park in back. He said currently CCS employees park in the front of the building, but there is a rear entry door, so employees could park in the back.

Commissioner Griggs asked if CCS had looked at moving their offices into the armory and considered that just on the other side of the wall would be the bus garage, where there would be diesel engines running. Commissioner Phillips said they would put in exhaust fans, a sprinkler system and some other things to address that. He said the cost to renovate would have been less, if the bus garage was not going there. Commissioner Griggs asked what the cost of renovations would be for the current bus garage. Commissioner Phillips said the cost for renovating the current bus garage is about \$200,000 and then another \$200,000 is needed for a food storage building. Commissioner Stiles asked where the food is currently being stored. Commissioner Phillips said it is stored in several different places around the county. Commissioner Griggs said she would like an outline of where all food storage locations are. Commissioner Phillips said he would get that for her. Commissioner Eichenbaum clarified with Commissioner Phillips that the armory exchange would meet all of the schools needs by getting everything in one location. Commissioner Phillips said it would.

Concerning central office, Commissioner Phillips said other county offices could also go in that building. He said he just thought of the veteran's office and the elections office, due to the need to move the veteran's office out of the courthouse, and for better parking access for the elections office. Commissioner Eichenbaum agreed that the elections office needs to be relocated where there is better parking, and that the veteran's office needed to be moved out of the courthouse.

Commissioner Griggs commented that the county is finishing up the new 911 Backup facility and asked, once that space is free in the code enforcement building, will it be sufficient for the offices remaining there; or, will the county be looking at the need for new facilities for Emergency Management, EMS admin and Code Enforcement. The County Manager said that the EM Coordinator and EMS Director wasn't present, but that he would say no, ultimately it does not meet their needs. He went on to say that with the 911 backup center out of the building, it certainly provides for more opportunities than is currently there, and it also buys the Board some time to think about what its next step is for these offices. He said the greatest space need right now is for the veteran services office.

Commissioner Westmoreland said he had talked to the Robin Caldwell, Emergency Management Director about the need for an emergency operations center, and Al Lovingood, Chief of Murphy Fire Department about the need for a place to store the department's ladder truck. Commissioner Stiles discussed a proposal from Mr. Lovingood and Mrs. Caldwell. The proposal included joint use of the facility. It was proposed to use the facility as an emergency operations center and an emergency administration building, and for the home of a new Murphy fire station to serve Murphy rural fire district.

Commissioner Griggs said that the county had also received a proposal from a local business owner wanting to purchase the armory.

There was discussion about other county uses for the armory; such as the potential for a Health and Human Services building, to include the health department, social services and senior services.

Commissioner Stiles mentioned the Mountain Folk Center as a possible location for a CCS bus garage.

Commissioner Westmoreland discussed the large flag pole at the armory and made a Motion to move it to the new EMS Station 1. Motion seconded by Commissioner Stiles. Motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Griggs said if the county is going to utilize the armory that county I.T. needs to be included in the discussions.

Other Business

Commissioner Westmoreland said there are structural issues with the annex building in the EMS day room. He said there are two steel beams rusting out. County maintenance will look into it.

Motion made by Commissioner Griggs to cancel the March 1st meeting. Motion seconded by Commissioner Phillips. Motion passed unanimously.

Closed Session

Motion made by Commissioner Stiles to go into closed session to pursuant to §143-318.11(a) (3) to discuss the Hogan vs. Cherokee County case. Motion seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Motion passed unanimously.

After returning to open session, there was no action taken on items discussed in closed session.

There being no further business, a Motion was made by Commissioner Griggs to adjourn. Motion seconded by Commissioner Phillips. Motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 7:45 P.M.

THESE MINUTES WERE APPROVED AT A REGULAR MEETING OF THE CHEROKEE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS ON APRIL 5, 2021.