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ROB NEY
Project & Operations Manager

MEMORANDUM

TO: Satpal Singh Sidhu, County Executive

FROM: Rob Ney, Project & Operations Manager 

RE: Northwest Annex Feasibility Study Update

DATE: September 3, 2021

▪ **Background and Purpose**

In April 2020, Whatcom County Council unanimously approved an ordinance providing funding to explore the redevelopment options for the Northwest Annex site.

RMC Architects was selected to perform the feasibility study for the potential redevelopment of the Northwest Annex Campus. A contract was drafted and Approved by Council on June 16, 2020. The site has a 100+ year old building that currently houses Planning, Permitting and some Public Works functions. The building, previously a Care Facility, was purchased and remodeled in the early 1990's and is dilapidated beyond feasible repair. The study will include preliminary architectural design of the proposed master plan, preliminary floor plans, construction methodology and type, cost estimating and development of a preliminary budget for construction and implementation of the plan.

On February 9th, the Council directed staff to move forward with the incremental approach that will further study the Tennant Improvement and internal layout of building 1 in the RMC study. Additionally there will be permitting scoping and additional Civil Engineering effort.

Key Council Points/Take Aways at the February 9th presentation:

- Explore or analyze work from home and does a work from home scenario change our building planning. **Response:** It appears that the workforce is returning to the office and our planning efforts should anticipate a majority of our workforce "in-office".

- Encourage staff to Master Plan for future. **Response:** Staff echoes this sentiment. Further, the County furthered this effort with the Purchase of the parcel adjacent to the Jail Work Center and the surplus of Animal Control (freeing up funds for future development efforts). Facilities will continue to monitor the market for additional opportunities.
- Explore or plan for a Café in this complex: **Response:** The Courthouse has a café/restaurant area on the second floor. This space has been hard to lease and be fruitful for vendors. We have many inquiries, but most folks shy away from the space for several reasons, specifically our limited hours and need for hours seven days a week operations to be profitable. Council Member Frazey approached staff with the idea of food trucks on the campus. Staff supports this idea for several reasons. One, we do not devote square footage to a space that may be vacant searching for a vendor that can pencil with limited hours; The food truck concept could also benefit the soccer and baseball field users; The cost to provide power and potable water to these users is minimal for the benefit that the services provide.
- Stormwater improvements should be an amenity not an eye sore. **Response:** Staff agrees and will implement.
- Provide a large gathering area for staff meetings. **Response:** Planning efforts include large courtyards as well as large conference rooms.
- Encourage staff to work with Department Heads on space planning: **Response:** This will be implemented in the planning effort.

▪ **Findings from Phase 2 analysis**

Staff and RMC have been advancing our work on the Northwest Annex Redevelopment Project. A majority of our efforts in this phase were to understand any critical path items and work through additional space needs:

- Understanding the utility needs and coordinating with Ferndale, who is the utility provider.
- Understanding our Cultural, Historical and Archeological needs and requirements for the site.
- A "Pre-application" meeting was held with Whatcom County staff to understand development parameters.
- Further tenant improvement effort. Building increased in size to accommodate The WSU Extension folks that may be seeking space with the potential Forest Street Annex/Opportunity Council partnership.

▪ **Next Step Options**

Option 1: As in any scenario, there is the do nothing option. However, it is believed that neither staff nor the Council desires this option.

Option 2: Fund the Architectural and Engineering Phase of the project. Staff has estimated this effort, which includes the entire consultant team, Facilities staff time to

manage the project, and permitting will cost \$5,100,000. This effort would be funded by excess of federal funds from the CARES Act reimbursement. This fund currently has \$6.4 million in un-restricted funds. With the infusion of American Rescue Plan Act dollars, the un-restricted CARES Act funds can be used for County priorities similar to this long-standing facility need. Should the Council direct staff to continue this effort, staff would return with a Project Based Budget creation and an initial funding. This phase of effort would take approximately nine months to complete and be ready for bid.

This project was originally considered an effort to create a shovel ready project. However, those "infrastructure" federal funds have not been released. It is unknown if the anticipated funding will be available for this effort. Staff believes the project still has merit and meets the direction the Council has given to continue to master plan our future.

Please contact Rob Ney at extension 5365, if you have any questions regarding this information.

Enclosures