

County planning for new jail, other facilities

Boyle 1/23/15

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Gazette Newspapers

LAKE COUNTY - Maintenance issues at the Lake County Jail have prompted the Lake County Board of Commissioners to start planning for a new building.

"The jail itself was poorly designed, it just is infiltrated by a lot of water," said Board President Dan Troy.

About 18 months ago they had someone check the whole building and determined it would cost about \$20 million to repair all the water problems and other issues.

Since the jail operates 24/7 all year round and it is already 25 years old (opened January 1990), it was determined constructing a new facility would make more sense. He compared it to a used car which costs a lot for maintenance to keep it going.

It will take time to arrange financing and plan a new building, so they have begun the process.

Last year the County purchased The Pizza Parlor property at 135 East Erie St. which was between two properties the County already owned. The restaurant was demolished, as was the old Dworkin and Bernstein Building on the adjacent property. It is expected the

new jail facility would be built there, across from the current jail.

"First of all, it wouldn't just be a jail replacement, it would be a multi-purpose facility," Troy said.

Although it would be primarily a safety center and jail, it would also include office space for the Buildings and Grounds Department, he believed.

Troy said there are also discussions with the City of Painesville about perhaps leasing space in the new building since the Painesville Police Department does not operate a jail or have its own dispatch center.

The current jail houses about 350 inmates and sometimes exceeds that number.

"None of us in County was here when the jail was designed and built," Troy said.

The County had a minimum security jail on Blase-Nemeth Road in Painesville Township at one time, but it was closed for that purpose in December 2009 due to major budget cuts during the Great Recession.

It is anticipated the building the County owns at 125 East Erie St., which houses the Lake County Soil and Water Conservation District and other agencies, along with the house at 99 East

Erie St., which houses the Lake County Ohio University Extension Office, which does not heat and cool efficiently, will eventually come down as well.

Besides a new jail, the Commissioners are also considering the Lake County Engineer's need for new offices since the engineers and staff have been working out of what was an old Nike Site building on Blackbrook Road in Painesville Township which was built in the 1950s.

The Lake County Department of Utilities, although it has two floors in the Lake County Administration Building, is also cramped for space.

"So there'll be a lot of re-arranging the 'deck chairs,'" Troy said. "Probably in 2015 we'll be starting to put together a plan on just exactly how we want to do this, how everything's going to fit, and how we're going to pay for it.

"I'm just hopeful that we'll be able to do this with debt service, with contributions from impacted departments that are off general fund, like the Utilities Department and others, and be able to do this without really having to go to the taxpayers ..."

Asked to explain debt service, he said it was bonding the debt which was similar to taking out a mortgage. The County would have to

see what amount of payment it could manage over so many years for the cost of the construction.

He said Lake County has the smallest amount of bonded debt of all the counties in the state. Plus, debts for Juvenile Court, the Lake County Courthouse and old Post Office renovations will be paid off during the time of any new debt service.

Another consideration, he said, was reviewing whether the new adult detention center could share certain services with the Lake County Juvenile Detention Center such as laundry and food to save money.

Troy noted the County was responsible for "housing" the various county departments such as the courts, the prosecutor, engineer and sheriff.

So, overall, the County will be reviewing the overall situation of the various departments and their space needs to determine how best to house them in the future.

"We're also looking at the senior citizen center next door (to the County Administration Building)," Troy said. "There's a need on their part to sell the building.

"The church next door (Painesville United Methodist Church) had been interested in buying it, but they wanted to turn it into a parking lot for the church."

The thought is, if the County purchased the property, it would demolish the building and construct an addition to the Nolan Building (County Administration Building). The addition would then house the county engineer, Lake County Soil and Water, the Planning Commission and others.

However, nothing is definite at this point.

"The County, historically, has not built a lot of new facilities," Troy said.

He noted Lake County Job and Family Services was in what was initially a discount store; the County treasurer and auditor offices used to be a Newberry's; the County commissioners, Board of Elections and Department of Utilities are in an old bank building and so on.

While the county has been reusing existing buildings, the time has come, Troy said, to do some building.