

WILL COUNTY BOARD
DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS MEETING
MINUTES

December 15, 2011

8:45 a.m.

Will County Office Building

302 N. Chicago Street

Conference Room B

Joliet, IL

AGENDA

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Adamic called the meeting to order at 8:47 a.m.

ROLL CALL

Present were: Babich, Brooks, Howard, May, Stewart, Traynere, Wilhelmi, Winfrey, Zigrossi and Adamic.

Absent was: Deutsche.

Also Present: County Board Chief of Staff Bruce Friefeld.

Present from State's Attorney's Office: ASA Melanie Manning.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Ms. Zigrossi led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made by Mr. Stewart, second by Ms. Zigrossi, to approve the minutes from the November 17, 2011 meeting. All in favor. MOTION CARRIES.

DISCUSSION OF DECEMBER 15, 2011 COUNTY BOARD AGENDA

Mr. Adamic announced there would be three honorary Resolutions or Proclamations: one for the Bolingbrook Raiders football team's state championship, one for the Joliet Elks Lodge 296's check to juvenile drug court and one recognizing the Joliet businesses that are going green.

LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Mr. Radner stated there was a Plantings Ordinance, and Mr. Weigel would make a motion on the floor to include some changes. Although the original language specified "appeals to the County Board," Mr. Weigel will modify it to "appeals." In another section, a sentence would be deleted and another added to protect setbacks for the utilities' mechanical equipment. Residents will not be allowed to install plantings that might restrict access.

PUBLIC WORKS AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

Mr. Babich provided an overview of the Resolutions.

Mr. Wilhelmi arrived at this juncture.

Mr. Adamic asked for more information about the telescopic metal posts included in Resolution #11-475.

Mr. Babich explained the posts were used for signs installed at a higher level above the ground along the highways. Mr. Gould distributed a memo regarding the justification for the truck driver replacement hire. The Highway Department is short three drivers. There also is a replacement hire for the County Office Building's maintenance department.

Mr. Howard asked for an explanation considering the committee voted to deny it.

Mr. Adamic replied he believed the County Board had to vote on the measure.

Mr. Howard asked if it were another agenda item.

Ms. Zigrossi answered it was on the Executive Committee's agenda.

Ms. Manning stated the members of the Executive Committee set the agenda. If those members voted to have it on the agenda, it would be there.

Mr. Adamic asked if those items had to come to the County Board's floor.

Ms. Manning replied the Executive Committee sets the agenda. So if the members of the Executive Committee voted to include it on an agenda, the item would be placed there.

Mr. Adamic asked if the full County Board got an opportunity to vote it up or down and have the final word on the matter.

Ms. Manning replied if it appears on the County Board's agenda. My recollection is the County Board's rules control that issue. And the rules specify that the Executive Committee sets the agenda, and the County Board Chairman can add items to the agenda as well.

Mr. Howard asked if it was on the agenda.

Ms. Zigrossi replied yes.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

Ms. Winfrey stated there was a tour of the Pioneer Building.

Mr. Adamic asked what the members of the committee thought about the building.

Ms. Winfrey stated she would not spend that money.

Mr. Babich asked for the figure.

Mr. Adamic replied they don't have one. Would be worthwhile for the long haul to have that corner in close proximity to the courthouse?

Mr. Brooks noted that he and Mr. Maher had stood on the top floor of the building and looked to the west. If the county occupied the four corners of Ottawa and Jefferson streets, it might cause a traffic jam. When Joliet's city manager made a presentation earlier this year during a committee meeting, he mentioned 1 million people visit the courthouse alone every year. If everything else was on those four corners, Ottawa Street and the other streets would have to be reconstructed.

Mr. Babich stated it was his understanding that the offices in the EMCO Building would be moved to the Pioneer Building. Then the EMCO Building would be converted into space for courtrooms.

Mr. Palmer stated the County Executive had not been part of the discussions. The study done by Wight & Co. indicated that different offices would be relocated. Currently the State's Attorney and Probation are in the EMCO Building. Ideally Probation and the Public Defender should be housed in the same building because people who visit one of the offices also tend to visit the other. Then the State's Attorney's staff would not have as much contact with the people who they have convicted. We have not heard the details of who would go into which building, but that is something that should be addressed. Additionally, there is no short-term solution to the space and safety issues at the existing criminal courthouse. There remain many questions regarding funding and possible relocations. When the county bought the EMCO Building, a new staircase was installed to make the building safer. There also is a smaller and narrower staircase in the northeast corner of the building. If the entire building was filled with courtrooms, it still might be difficult to evacuate during an emergency.

Mr. Howard asked if the Pioneer Building had been checked for asbestos.

Ms. Winfrey replied she did not believe it had been. During the tour, the owner said there was not any asbestos.

Ms. Traynere arrived at this juncture.

Mr. Babich asked if purchasing the Pioneer Building just would be a patch up job so down the road we can buy the First Midwest Building, knock it down and create some garage space.

Mr. Friefeld replied this is part of a long-term plan consistent with the Master Plan for the county. There are four corners there that the county ought to control. We control the EMCO

Building, we control the courthouse, and we need to get the First Midwest Building from Joliet. In the meantime, the Chief Judge has notified the county that he will need five courtrooms. A courthouse cannot be built anytime soon. Is this temporary? Yes. It buys some time. In terms of this contract, it will tell us what must be done to the building if the county purchases it.

Mr. Howard asked how much the building cost.

Mr. Friefeld replied it was a matter of negotiation.

Mr. Howard asked for an approximate cost.

Mr. Friefeld answered perhaps less than \$5 million. No one has been authorized yet to negotiate the price.

Mr. Wilhelmi asked if the Chief Judge had considered extending the hours at the courthouse to accommodate the new judges.

Mr. Adamic noted he had suggested staggered hours.

Mr. Brooks commented much of the Pioneer Building was empty.

Mr. Friefeld stated many lawyers have moved their offices farther west.

Mr. Howard stated the study involved the Pioneer Building's parking. Would there also be a study of nearby traffic patterns or future parking?

Mr. Friefeld replied no. Joliet is on the verge of acquiring the Humphries Building.

Mr. Adamic stated the Humphries Building is south of the railroad tracks in downtown Joliet and east of Ottawa Street.

Mr. Friefeld stated the city of Joliet also wants the State's Attorney's building on Chicago Street that is across from the Rialto. In terms of parking, the First Midwest Bank building comes down and like the Humphries Building would become parking. Parking is a critical issue for downtown Joliet. This building might be a short-term solution for the courthouse.

Mr. Adamic asked Ms. Traynere for her opinion of the Pioneer Building.

Ms. Traynere replied she would rather not make a comment.

Mr. Adamic stated while the Pioneer Building might be a good location because of its proximity to the courthouse, if a study is done on the building, what if the county decides not to buy it? Then \$10,000 to \$15,000 would have been spent.

Mr. Friefeld stated there were multiple tours of the building. I don't believe a decision can be made on the building without doing a study.

Mr. Howard stated it appears a decision already has been made if the county is spending money on a study.

Mr. Friefeld stated the purpose of the study is to decide if the county should go any further.

Mr. Adamic asked if there were any other questions about Resolution #11-479.

Mr. Palmer stated the County Executive's office has spent a lot of time studying parking. I think there still are a lot of questions. I don't think the Executive is really excited about the Pioneer Building. The Wight study talked a lot about getting the right people in the right building rather than having a space and just putting someone there.

Mr. Wilhelmi asked Mr. Palmer for an explanation of what he did not like about the Pioneer Building.

Mr. Palmer answered having four corners might be a good thing, but do the four corners work together? Or is it simply four separate buildings that will each need security? And will there be enough space to put all the offices together?

Mr. Howard commented it would be cheaper to house everyone under one roof.

Mr. Wilhelmi stated the county was not going to spend \$100 million during the next five years.

Mr. Howard stated if the county keeps doing this it will spend that much money, \$6 million at a time.

Ms. Traynere the Pioneer Building was not discussed during the Capital Committee. The committee members simply were told to show up for a tour. It was not a part of Wight's Master Plan; it was not anything the committee members discussed.

Mr. Babich asked who the chairman of the Capital Committee was.

Mr. Stewart replied Chuck Maher.

Mr. Adamic asked if Ms. Traynere would have preferred a discussion at the committee level and then a check of the building by Wight & Co.

Ms. Traynere replied yes.

Mr. Wilhelmi stated the building was worth considering if it could be purchased for a reasonable price. It is a good location, it is a nice size and it is a newer office building for downtown Joliet.

Mr. Brooks commented that he did not know if it was newer.

Mr. Adamic stated the Pioneer Building had been rehabbed.

Mr. Palmer stated the EMCO Building was purchased for \$4 million, and the vote was divided. In the years since, there has been much discussion that the county should not have bought it. There probably has been \$5 million to \$6 million spent on renovations, and there still is renovation work that should occur. So that number will increase. How much do we want to spend on retrofitting a building and making it work as opposed to doing new construction that uses the latest technology and is efficient as possible. But the county does not have a huge pot

of money. Cash reserves are down today by several million. As was discussed during the budget process, the county does not have \$6 million above the 25% anymore. It is below that number. But where will the money come from? That has not been determined yet.

Mr. Adamic asked the members of the caucus what they wanted to do about the Pioneer Building.

Ms. Winfrey asked the cost of the study.

Mr. Adamic replied about \$15,000.

Mr. Wilhelmi stated it might be worth doing.

Ms. May stated she would not support it.

Mr. Howard commented if the efficiency of the heating system and insulation were considered, new construction would be far superior. The long-term energy costs and other factors must be considered. As government, we have to lead the way. If the county continually spends \$2 million to \$5 million here and there, 10 years later, \$50 million or \$60 million has been spent, and the county owns old buildings.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Mr. Adamic provided an overview of the Resolutions.

Ms. May state board members can call Mack Communications and arrange to use their services.

Ms. Winfrey noted that she already had used Mack's services.

Mr. Palmer commented that Smith Dawson & Andrews has brought the county more than \$3 million separate from stimulus funds. Since 2007, the county has paid \$300,000 to Lois Mayer but she has brought in more than \$2 million in grants. That is a good return on our investment.

Mr. Wilhelmi asked if Smith Dawson was taking a new direction now that earmarks are gone.

Mr. Palmer answered Smith Dawson is moving away from earmarks and working more on policy decisions with department heads. The firm also is focusing more on grants. The money hasn't gone away completely. It has gone to the agencies and that can be harder. Instead of working directly with a congressman for an earmark, now there are competitive bid processes or discretionary money.

Mr. Howard asked who the state lobbyist is.

Mr. Palmer answered it was Bill Mahar.

Mr. Adamic stated the county is going to hire someone else. Is there any information about any other contracts?

Mr. Palmer answered the County Executive asked to have the Resolution regarding the McKibbin Group tabled. There now is a two-year contract not to exceed \$40,000, but we have seen very little reporting on this. The sticking point is the future health care plan. Once there is a health care plan that will drive the wages. So it is the economics that will solve the labor negotiations. We have just hired a new attorney to handle labor issues. They just met this week with the labor leaders, and they will meet next week with the labor management teams. They are planning an aggressive schedule for 2012. The County Executive believes there can be some significant progress to resolve the outstanding contracts and get an insurance package done.

Mr. Adamic stated the McKibbin Group provided a tool for the toolbox. If you don't use it, you don't spend the money. It does not preclude the County Executive from having these discussions with leadership in January.

Mr. Palmer stated the County Executive did not request this. All he does is sign the Resolution.

Mr. Adamic asked who made the decision to call Mr. McKibbin during labor negotiations.

Mr. Palmer answered the county board.

Mr. Wilhelmi stated I do not know of any work on plan design, and we still spent \$25,000 on the McKibbin Group. There is no reason why the contract should be for two years.

Mr. Howard commented there should be some kind of control because it is the taxpayers' money.

Ms. Traynere stated she had a question about Resolution #11-488. When I was on the Legislative Committee, there was supposed to be some discussion about a procedure to follow before distributing the money from Waste Management. Was the procedure completed?

Mr. Palmer answered there was money specific to District 8, and it was going through a committee process. I don't believe all of that money has been spent.

Mr. Stewart asked Mr. Palmer to check on the status of the funding.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Mr. Stewart, second by Ms. Winfrey to adjourn the meeting at 9:33 a.m. All in favor.

MOTION CARRIES.