



Mount Vernon

An Innovative Community; Authentically Hometown

City Completes Purchase of Downtown Properties

Has begun working with architects on preliminary design of Courthouse

MOUNT VERNON, July 26, 2022 – The City has finalized contracts for the purchase of four buildings in downtown Mount Vernon, at 3 E. High St., 16 N. Main St., 4 E. Chestnut St. and 6 E. Chestnut St.

The High Street property is situated on the northeast side of the Public Square, and will be the location of the new Municipal Courthouse, as well as the offices of the City Law Director. The properties on North Main and East Chestnut streets are directly north of City Hall, and will be utilized as an annex for City offices. The City is now the owner of these four properties.

“Tenants have been contacted and the City is working with them to meet their needs during this transition,” said Mayor Matt Starr.

That transition will take place over the next several years. The existing buildings at these locations will be demolished, and the City has begun working with an architectural firm to come up with a conceptual exterior design for the new structures.

“The City is researching ways to retain retail space downtown, and if necessary develop new retail space,” said Starr. “Throughout this process we will be focused on respecting the historical and architectural character of downtown as these new facilities are designed.

“We will continue to be transparent with the community as these plans are developed.”

A special committee of City officials was organized earlier this year to assess the viability of various locations for a new Municipal Court Building and Police Department, as the costs of renovating the Court’s current location at 5 N. Gay St., known as the Plaza Building and built in 1974, had become prohibitively expensive.

City Engineer Brian Ball noted that the City spent \$631,053 on capital improvements on the building from 2016 through 2021, with another \$91,000 slated to be spent this year.

“The Plaza Building is reaching the end of its life,” Ball said. “Five years ago structural engineers advised us that the facility had about 10 years left before a complete structural overhaul would be required.”

“Relocating the Municipal Court and other departments at 5 N. Gay is the most fiscally responsible option for the City,” said Safety-Service Director Rick Dzik.

Mount Vernon City Council Person Mel Severns, chair of Council’s Streets and Public Buildings Committee, noted that the Plaza Building houses about 60 City employees, while thousands of people from the City, Knox County and beyond have business at the Courthouse every year. “Their safety – today, tomorrow and years from now – has to be of paramount concern to us,” he said.

“In researching a new location for the Court, we were focused on looking several decades down the road,” said Municipal Court Judge John Thatcher. “A city’s downtown is traditionally seen as the seat of government. The public should be able to find us easily.”

The City and Municipal Court conducted thorough assessments that also looked at several potential locations outside downtown for a new Municipal Court, Police Department and Law Director's offices. However, there were significant drawbacks with each of them. Although the committee was careful to keep its options open, exorbitant costs ultimately became a significant factor with the other locations.

While the Plaza Building will eventually come down, the structure underneath it will continue functioning as a parking garage for people coming downtown – after some repairs to it are completed.

Contractors recently began the process of reinforcing the structure, which was closed to the public over the spring because of safety considerations. This will essentially convert it from a concrete to a steel building, as the contractors work from the bottom up. The ground level of the parking garage could once again be open to vehicles as soon as the end of the summer.

Future press releases over the next several weeks will focus on the cost-benefit analysis that went into the selection of the properties on East High, North Main and East Chestnut streets; why these sites were ultimately chosen and others were not; the many functions and responsibilities of the Municipal Court; the future location of the Police Department; and the plans for the new City Hall Annex.

END

ABOUT THE CITY OF MOUNT VERNON:

The City of Mount Vernon is an innovative community with an authentic hometown feel. The City is dedicated to providing modern services with an emphasis on continual improvement, customer service and equitable laws that support our citizens and visitors, while retaining and attracting investors in our community. Home to 17,000 people, Mount Vernon is the county seat for Knox County and boasts historic buildings and districts as well as business and professional, educational and recreational opportunities through many adaptive reuses of the community's infrastructure and spaces. The City has strong ties to higher education, with Mount Vernon Nazarene University, Kenyon College and Central Ohio Technical College operating satellite locations in the historic downtown. Located 40 miles northeast of Columbus, Mount Vernon is near the geographic center of Ohio and has connections all over the globe.

CONTACT: Todd Hill
PHONE: (740) 393-9517
DATE: July 26, 2022