



Mount Vernon

An Innovative Community; Authentically Hometown

Cost-Benefit Analyses Drove Courthouse Decision

Properties on and near Public Square made the most sense financially

MOUNT VERNON, September 13, 2022 – Before the City of Mount Vernon decided this past spring to enter into agreements to purchase four property parcels on and near the Public Square for the relocation of the Municipal Court and other City offices, a special committee of City officials was organized to determine the best location for the move.

The costs of renovating the Court’s current building at 5 Gay St., built in 1974 and also housing the Police Department and the offices of the City Law Director, had become prohibitively expensive, necessitating the search for a new home for these facilities.

The committee focused most closely on three locations --- at Cooper Progress Park; the properties along the east side of South Sandusky Street from West High Street south to West Gambier Street; as well as the parcels it ultimately decided to purchase. Those are at 3 E. High St., 16 N. Main St., 4 E. Chestnut St. and 6 E. Chestnut St.

The courthouse committee also gave careful consideration to a handful of other potential locations across the City before determining that they would not be fit. Cost was a significant factor in the analysis for all the sites, although other issues were also addressed.

“The committee was charged with making a decision that will ultimately impact the City for decades to come, so we had to get this right,” said City Engineer Brian Ball, P.E. “After looking at the site costs and other factors a clear choice gradually emerged for the future location of our Municipal Court.”

Below is a breakdown of the estimated costs associated with the three principal sites analyzed by the City’s courthouse committee:



Cooper Progress Park; properties in blue

Cooper Progress Park

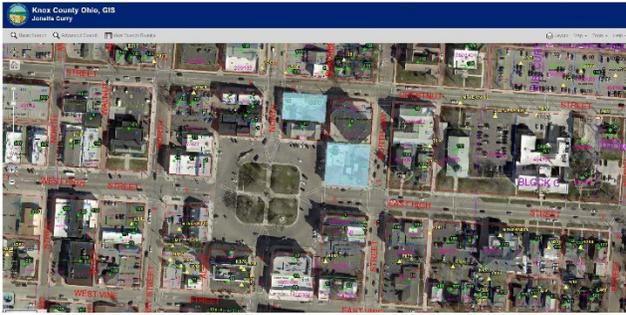
- Lot size – 3.7 acres
- Property cost – \$1.65 million
\$450,000 for asbestos abatement
- Demolition cost – \$515,800
- Total cost – \$2.6 million ***



Properties along east side of South Sandusky Street

South Sandusky/West High Streets

- Lot size – 3.0 acres
- Property cost – \$4.3 million
- Demolition cost – \$142,900
- Total cost – \$4.4 million



Properties on and near the Public Square purchased by City

Public Square

- Lot size – 0.62 acres
- Property cost – \$1.5 million
- Demolition cost – \$219,600
- Total cost – \$1.7 million

*** Because of the Cooper Progress Park's homeowner association requirement for publicly financed buildings, the City would also have been responsible for an annual fee ranging from \$20,000 to \$50,000.

Also considered was the former Mount Vernon News building at 18 E. Vine St., the former First Merit Bank building at South Main and Gambier streets, and property adjacent to the Knox County Sheriff's Office on Upper Gilchrist Road.

However, the Knox County Land Bank already had development plans for the old News building, while parking would have been inadequate at the former bank site, which also has ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) shortcomings. Finally, the county's land on the east end of the City is not for sale, and is far from being centrally located to provide easy access for those needing alternative forms of transportation.

A prime consideration for the committee in its analysis besides cost was assuring that the Municipal Court could be easily found and accessed at its new location by the thousands of people who visit the facility annually.

The Ohio Revised Code requires that a city's legislature shall provide "suitable accommodations" for a Municipal Court and its officers. The Ohio Supreme Court's court facility standards dictate that the site, in addition to being separate from non-judicial governmental agencies, should be in a building that is "dignified and properly maintained."

"The Municipal Court has been an integral part of the justice system in Knox County for 70 years. The Court has countywide jurisdiction for all misdemeanor criminal offenses, limited jurisdiction for felonies, handles all traffic violations, hears all civil cases where the amount in controversy is less than \$15,000 and processes all evictions and small claims cases. Last year the Court handled over 5,000 cases and case numbers were even higher in pre-pandemic years," said Municipal Court Judge John Thatcher.

"It is vitally important that plans proceed for a new Court building so that Court operations are not interrupted by moving to a temporary facility in the event the current building has a major structural or mechanical failure. The building is also too small and outdated to serve the public's needs now and in the future," he said.

The property at 3 E. High St. 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.

While the existing structures will be demolished, the City is working with architectural consultants to assure that the buildings' exterior design is in keeping with the downtown's historical and architectural character. In addition, the current retail space will be improved.

"The downtowns in many cities across our state have experienced an exodus of business and other entities. Due to many quality people, our Mount Vernon downtown is thriving," said Council Person Mel Sevens. "In order to maintain the vitality of our downtown, we on City Council believe

it is necessary to utilize the lots on the northeast corner of our square to build a new Municipal Courthouse, and the lots immediately north of City Hall for a City office annex.”

Future press releases will focus on 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.

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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.

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