



Mount Vernon

An Innovative Community; Authentically Hometown

City Addresses Public's Thoughts on New Courthouse

Mayor Starr responds to comments submitted after informational meeting

MOUNT VERNON, January 30, 2024 – During the summer of 2022, the City finalized the purchase of four property parcels on and near the Public Square for the relocation of the Municipal Court and other City offices. These parcels are located 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 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 courthouse committee also gave careful consideration to a handful of other potential locations across the City before determining that they would not be suitable. Cost was a significant factor in the analysis for all the sites, although other issues were also addressed.

On October 5, 2023, the City of Mount Vernon hosted a public meeting on design renderings for the City's new Municipal Court Building, and new Police Station, which will be located on Sychar Road. At the meeting, attendees were able to discuss the projects with City officials, ask questions and provide input. After the meeting, the public was encouraged to send in written comments to further address concerns over the current design plans.

A principal concern in the received comments centered around preserving the historic integrity of the City within the Courthouse designs. As Mayor Starr emphasized in his response, "The historical features on the extension of the building facing Public Square will be replicated to reflect the late 1800s time frame to mark the historic architecture."

Comments about the proposed location for the new Courthouse underscored concerns over historic preservation and safety issues. Some suggested other vacant lots be used instead. "Other vacant lots were considered," said Starr, "but when this opportunity to purchase the adjacent building came, it made the most sense to have a centralized city complex, or campus, for more responsiveness to customers/citizens conducting business with the City. Safety is of utmost importance, including mitigating and limiting the current structure and life-safety issues of the newly acquired building."

Concerns also arose over ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliance. "It will be compliant for all life-safety measures including a fire suppression system and bomb-resistant walls," said Starr. During the search process, other lots were dismissed due to ADA shortcomings. Compliance with such measures is a primary concern for the City.

How retail/office/housing space will be preserved, and concerns about parking availability during construction, were also addressed in the comments. Said Starr, "Retail and office spaces will remain on the ground floor (and possibly the basement)." The current retail spaces in the building will be retained and improved.

As for parking, “A specific plan will be developed between the City and the construction contractor to be able to conduct court business,” said Starr.

The size of the new courthouse was mentioned in some comments, as it will be taller than any current buildings on the Public Square. “One of the measures that was important to plan for,” said the Mayor, “was the growth of the City and Municipal Court services. Therefore, a second courtroom will be included to respond to potentially increased court activity.” Looking ahead at the future growth of the City, increased Municipal Court capacities are necessary so the building can remain viable for decades to come.

Currently, the Municipal Courthouse construction is in the planning phase. Before the design phase can be initiated, the City budget, along with the funding package for design, must be approved. The City projects four and a half to five years before construction can commence.

“Acquiring public comments and opinion is a vital part of this process, and we want to place due consideration on all aspects of the operation before continuing,” said Starr.

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: January 30, 2024