

**THE MORGAN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS AND MORGAN COUNTY COUNCIL MET IN A JOINT SESSION ON MONDAY, JUNE 6, 2022 AT 7:30 P.M.**

COMMISSIONER MEMBERS PRESENT WERE: BRYAN COLLIER AND DON ADAMS. KENNY HALE WAS ABSENT. COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT WERE: KIM MERIDETH, VICKIE KIVETT, TROY SPRINKLE, KELLY ALCALA, JASON MAXWELL, AND MELISSA GREENE. CHIP KELLER WAS ABSENT. ALSO PRESENT WERE: DEB VERLEY, EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT; JOSH MESSMER, COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR; AND JIM WISCO, COUNTY ATTORNEY; ERIC RATTS, DLZ; ZACH KLUTZ, TAFT LAW; PATRICK DAVIS, MEYER-NAJEM; AND JASON SEMLER, BAKER TILLY. KENNY HALE WAS ABSENT.

PLEDGE

PRAYER – *Kim Merideth*

**PRESENTATION OF MASTER PLAN**

Bryan Collier stated that he thought this would be one of the most historic meetings since 1857. The county can sink a lot of money into the Courthouse and still not have a functioning Courthouse. Security and keeping employees safe is a priority. They have had several meetings, completed a study, looked at other county courthouses, and have drafted a plan that the majority believe will use tax dollars wisely to invest in the next 25 to 75 years.

Eric Ratts, DLZ, stated that he is a Morgan County resident and as a resident, wants to make sure that they are doing the right things for the right reasons. Mr. Ratts stated that this phased plan to expand, renovate and consolidate county government buildings is a monumental decision. The study that was presented in December of 2020 led into this work in progress. The Administration Building was built in 1996 and is in need of an upgrade. The first step in the Justice Campus is a 184-car surface parking lot, a Justice Building, Bicentennial Park, then a full renovation of the Courthouse and repurposing the building, the last phase would be to renovate the Administration Building and repurpose it for court related functions. Mr. Ratts then presented drawings of the plans. Mr. Ratts stated that the design emphasized the importance of separating the inmates from the public and staff and one checkpoint for entry and exit. The historic Courthouse will be repurposed for administrative offices and renovated including redoing HAVC, plumbing and electrical so it is up to code. The current Administration Building will be repurposed and renovated for court-related functions such as clerk and court services.

Patrick Davis, Meyer-Najem, stated that BOT 1 was approved earlier for the parking lot, security vestibule, and easy annex building. BOT 2 would consist of the Justice Building and Bicentennial Park with an estimated cost of \$24,500,000. BOT 3 would be the Courthouse renovation and expansion estimated to cost \$19,500,000. BOT 4 would be the Administration Building renovation and an exterior reclad and estimated costs are \$13,700,000. They will continue to analyze ways to reduce costs as the project moves forward. Mr. Ratts stated that a lot of effort by many people has been put into this project to make it something to be proud of.

Jason Semler, Baker Tilly, stated that he serves as bond counsel and county government is limited in ways to fund the project; property taxes, income taxes, or a combination of the two. The BOT 1 bonds are closing this week. BOT 2, if approved, could be issued and close late this year with potential construction next spring. The bonds that just closed are anticipated to be paid from property taxes. An assessed value of \$100,000 would mean an increase of \$11.00 per year. BOT 2 would be an estimated 5 cent rate increase, BOT 3 an increase of 4 cents and BOT 4, 3 cents. All four projects would total 17 cents which would be an \$83 per year increase in property taxes for an average \$160,000 home in Morgan County. The increase does not happen all at once as the project is planned in phases. This also assumes no growth over the next 24 years. If bonds are paid by income taxes, there would be no increase in property taxes.

Bryan Collier stated that they are researching ways to pay for the bonds and it is important for the citizens and taxpayers to know that the county has a AA- bond rating and a good cash flow. Mr. Collier did not think it cost efficient to pay out \$43 to \$46 million for the existing Courthouse only to have a non-modern, non-functional Courthouse. Kim Merideth stated that the Christmas lights on the outside of the Courthouse are beautiful, but it is not operational for a modern court system when you have opposing sides for a court case sitting next to each other in the hallway. Vickie Kivett stated that you can send a man to the moon, but you can't get the hearing and air adjusted in the building. The plumbing and wiring are old and there are ADA issues in the restrooms. Troy Sprinkle stated that employees are working where there is no wi-fi or appropriate tools to do their job. Security is key and the requirements are not being met. Kelly Alcala stated that the Courthouse is lacking in keeping the employees safe and in a clean environment. These projects should have started 15 years ago and they are starting it at the worst possible time. Ms. Alcala asked if the scope of the project could be scaled back. Jason Maxwell agreed that something needs to be done, he needs to be able to explain why property taxes have gone up and it is a bad time to start a project, but something must be done. Melissa Greene stated that she was glad they are able to take a 163 year-old building and make it functional. The cost is frightening, but it probably isn't going to get any better. The county needs

functional space; they have outgrown the Courthouse and it isn't safe. This is an historical project, and the Commissioners are working hard for a solution. Don Adams stated that it is time. They need to make a move. The county is on the verge of a growth spurt and they need to invest in themselves or no one else will invest in the county.

Patrick Davis noted that in the 23 years he has been doing these projects, the only time he has seen costs drop was in 2008/2009. In general, costs escalate, especially labor costs.

Bryan Collier stated that interest rates are also on the rise. They are asking that the Council vote to move forward with the broad project, not the specifics.

Vickie Kivett thanked the judges that were present for attending the meeting.

Former Morgan County Superior Court I Judge, Tom Gray, stated that he had been in the Courthouse 50 years, 5 months, and 6 days. The employees deserve more credit and more money than the county gives them. The population has almost doubled and there is the potential of at least 600 more houses in Martinsville, 1,000 in Mooresville and more in Monrovia. What is proposed today will be full in five years and they will need another three courtrooms. Judge Gray stated that he did not see the room for expansion and that they will need it. The building will not be sufficient in 25 years. Judge Gray suggested letting the Merry Mac Players, Chamber of Commerce and Red Cross use the current Courthouse and find a place for county administration offices. The paper stated last week that the average sale for a house in Morgan County was \$299,000 not \$160,000.

Current Morgan County Superior Court I Judge, Pete Foley, stated that he discerned a consensus of need from the Council comments. If they agree on the need but don't agree on a structure, they invest in the existing structure. But if they do that, what do they have? They have an opportunity to reorder the physical plant of the county in a way that will set up a campus for the court and administrative functions for the next 100 years or more. The county does not have a bank account with millions of excess dollars because the system was designed to tax what is needed. This plan allows the county to maintain buildings and a presence in Martinsville, while preserving a centerpiece building in a way that is functional and reorders the buildings for the future. Judge Foley gave a few highlights from the 1972 Courthouse expansion and stated that they are in a place to set a foundation for growth to occur and it won't be in a piecemeal way.

Judge Brian Williams, Superior Court II, stated that jurors should not be rubbing shoulders with defendants' families or witnesses, children shouldn't be in the hallway for their adoption case while child molesters are being brought down the hallway. It is necessary and well thought out.

Dave Rogers, Morgan County Jail Commander, stated that Courthouse security falls under his control. The building is past due for an upgrade. It is an issue to try and keep jurors separate from other parties, the elevator is often not functioning and that provides another set of problems. Court security also responds to the Administration Building, Prosecutor, and Probation. Staff is running to serve four different buildings in the downtown area. A Justice Campus with all court functions in one facility would provide more security and safety for employees and public. Mr. Rogers noted that taxpayers pay taxes for services, not to bank it. The more functional the courts are, the less time they have to keep an inmate and the less beds they need to have.

Judge Pete Foley handed out a letter that the President of the Bar Association, Dakota VanLeeuwen drafted. (See attached.)

Bryan Collier stated that if assessments rise, the rate will come down and they will still be in the same ballpark.

Vickie Kivett asked if it would be possible to add a third floor to the judicial wing, or the current Administration Building, or if there was area for expansion in the bicentennial park. Mr. Collier stated that there is room for future expansion in the park area and also towards Mulberry Street to the west. Kim Merideth stated that technology would also help in not needing as much space. Eric Ratts stated that likelihood of adding a third level to the current building is slim and not recommended. There are options for future expansion.

Janice Kistler, Martinsville resident, stated that she is frustrated by the lack of information for the project and would appreciate knowing where to send people for more information. Ms. Kistler stated that she is also concerned about storage in the lower level.

Cecelia Krefft, Martinsville resident, stated that there are needs for change, but it needs to be scaled back because it is too much money.

Martinsville Mayor Kenny Costin stated that he applauded the Commissioners for researching options and thanked them for staying in Martinsville. The economic impact that the courts and county offices have on the downtown area is significant. Mayor Costin thanked the county for keeping the offices in

Martinsville.

Bryan Collier stated that what is being presented today is not the final product; it is a place to start and refine.

Don Adams made a motion to affirm the plan and move forward. Motion seconded by Bryan Collier. Motion carried 2-0. (Kenny Hale was absent.)

Kim Merideth stated that they have a responsibility to constituents to provide a safe work environment for employees. Melissa Greene made a motion to move forward with the project. Kelly Alcala stated that she was in favor of proceeding, but would never approve the dollar amount and seconded the motion. Troy Sprinkle stated that if there was a way to fund it so it wasn't a burden on the taxpayers, he would agree with it. Motion carried 6-0. (Chip Keller was absent.)

**ADJOURNMENT**

Don Adams made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Motion seconded by Bryan Collier. Motion carried 2-0.

Vickie Kivett made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Motion seconded by Troy Sprinkle. Motion carried 6-0.

MORGAN COUNTY BOARD OF  
COMMISSIONERS

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Kenny Hale

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Bryan Collier

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Don Adams

MORGAN COUNTY COUNCIL

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Kim Merideth

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Vickie Kivett

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Troy Sprinkle

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Kelly Alcala

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Jason Maxwell

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Melissa Greene

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Chip Keller

ATTEST:

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Dan Bastin, Morgan Co. Auditor