

Public Hearing Minutes
January 16, 2024
City Hall, Council Chambers

Call To Order:

Mayor Omerza called the public hearing to order at 5:00pm at Ely City Hall in the Council Chambers.

PRESENT: Council members A.Forsman, Kess, Debeltz(5:15pm), Callen, Campbell, Bisbee and Mayor Omerza

Purpose:

The Public Hearing will be an informational meeting to discuss the Fire Apparatus Building and Ely Area Ambulance Garage including economic and environmental impacts, service area, alternatives to the project, and potential funding sources, including USDA Rural Development. All residents and property owners within the City of Ely, City of Winton, Town of Morse, Fall Lake Township, Stoney River Township and citizens located within unorganized areas of St. Louis County within the 1500 square miles of the ambulance primary service area are encouraged to attend.

Clerk Langowski indicated that the City of Ely was awarded a \$1.3 Million dollar grant from USDA Rural Development for the Fire and First Responder Apparatus Building and the Ely Area Ambulance Garage.

The first portion of the project is valued at \$650,000 and is for renovations and an addition of the existing Ambulance garage on Camp Street. This building was purchased about a year and a half ago by the Ely Area Ambulance Joint Powers Board which includes Ely, Winton, Town of Morse, and Fall Lake Township for the Ely Ambulance Service to operate from. The building was purchased had previously been used as contractor's office and shop. The building had multiple offices that have been converted to bedrooms for overnight staffing. There are multiple code compliance issues and unfinished portions of the living quarters and equipment storage that require completion and renovations to adequately serve the ambulance service's needs. The existing building requires approximately \$200,000 in renovations to meet these requirements. The existing building will be used for staff housing, training, and equipment storage for some of the equipment. An additional space is necessary for storage of other ambulances operated by the service. The estimated cost for the additional building is \$450,000.

In addition to the joint ambulance service the City of Ely is planning to build a fire and first responder apparatus storage garage. The historic City Hall/Fire Hall is beyond its capacity and an auxiliary facility is required to store the newer, larger equipment. With ongoing, increasing threat of wild fire the city also has wild land firefighting equipment that requires storage space. Currently this equipment is stored in make shift facilities that are scheduled for future demolition or outside. The overall budget for the fire and first responder apparatus storage garage is \$650,000.

The ambulance joint powers have worked for the past five years to determine the best option for the ambulance facility and the staffing model that meets the community's needs. The cost of the facility is out of reach for the contributing members. Many of the citizens are elderly or low income and cannot afford the additional burden the facility would put on the taxpayers. With the need for the service on a continual increase the construction of the facility is necessary to meet the needs. The summer tourism boom in the area puts a strain on the current service and improvements area needed to improve efficiency and reduce overall operating costs.

The Ely Fire Department and First Responders have operated from the historic Ely City Hall since 1929. Over nearly a century the equipment has changed significantly for first responders and fire departments. The city has been updating equipment over the past fifteen years. The newer equipment is much larger with additional capabilities as compared to the 1950's and 1970's equipment that is being replaced. In the last five years the City of Ely has replaced all of the primary response apparatus with newer up to date equipment that will serve the residents into the foreseeable future. The size of these four pieces of equipment is much greater than what they replace. We have also seen a significant increase in the frequency and intensity of wild fire season. In response to these changing conditions additional wild land firefighting equipment has been needed to protect the community. The City of Ely is unable to provide the necessary funds to both upgrade equipment and provide updated space for storage. The estimated cost of this portion of the project is \$800,000. The City of Ely will be providing in kind labor, equipment and funding totaling \$150,000 to complete the project.

Langowski went through the preliminary engineering drawings for both the Fire and First Responder building and the Ambulance garage building and updates. Langowski discussed the site plans for each of the buildings and went through the floor plans. In the Fire and First Responder building in the workout room we can use some of the public safety funds for the room which can also be an incentive for the retention of police officers, firefighters and first responders. After this hearing we will finalize the drawings and send them to the USDA rural development. We hope to have both projects start this summer.

Larry Polyner -1560 N 20th Ave E – Polyner stated that he likes where the new ambulance garage is located, it fits the needs of the community. The additional space for the additional garage for the ambulance seems to be a waste of money. The existing ambulances fit in the existing structure right now, and they would be moved to the other building to accommodate a meeting room. The ambulance service has been in existence since the 1990s and they have not had a meeting room till this point. At this point the existence of the ambulance service is up in the air because of funding, they are having the same issues that all ambulance services on the range are having. It is questionable as to whether the hospital is going to take the ambulance service back or not. Polyner indicated that it seems foolish to build the additional building not knowing whether or not it will be needed six months from now. Langowski indicated that there

will be a Joint Ambulance Powers Board meeting to discuss these options with the hospital and the ambulance service.

Bisbee asked about the hospital's feasibility study and if the hospital will be able to use these structures if they were to take over. Langowski indicated that he believes so, but there have only been preliminary discussions. Currently there is not a move to do a different model than what is currently being done. They are aware of the current facility and the improvements that are scheduled to be completed.

Michael Smith – 1047 E Sheridan St – Smith indicated that he is a member of the Fire Department and a First Responder. Smith is in favor of the Fire apparatus building, for the fire department to have safe and accessible storage for apparatus including vehicles, trucks and equipment including pumps and hoses. It is really important as a firefighter and as a taxpayer because these things take money to maintain and if they are left out in the weather or in a leaky garage where some of the equipment is currently being stored, it is not leaking directly on the equipment, but it is still wet when some members have to work on them. It will also give members quicker access to stored equipment when called upon and possibly lower response time. Smith thanked the leadership of the fire department and Clerk Langowski and all the stakeholders, to develop this site, it is a great opportunity for the fire department.

Adjourn

Mayor Omerza adjourned the public hearing at 5:28pm without objection.

Casey Velcheff
Deputy Clerk