

\$6.2 million facility should be ready to serve community in October 2009

Design plans herald dawn of a new era for police, fire department operations

Plans for Grinnell's new \$6.2 million public safety building were presented to the city council and the public Tuesday evening, and represent a quantum leap into the 21st century for the facility housing the community's fire and police departments.

The 32,000-square-foot facility, which will replace the 50-year-old structure at the corner of Fourth and Spring, will enclose roughly four times the space of the current one. While it is designed to improve the efficiency and safety of departmental operations, those working on the initiative also take pride in the fact that it is a lean and green construction project.

Where demolition of the current Fareway building would have cost the city money while sending a huge amount of material to the landfill as refuse, the decision to re-use the existing structure will shave roughly half a million dollars off of the project's cost.

"One of the primary tenets of 'green building' is to re-use where possible," said John Carrmann of FEH Associates, the architectural firm working with the city and mayor's task force on the project. "The structure is very sound and in good condition. In the end, it worked out very nicely for us - giving us a little bit more space for a little bit less money."

The decision will also shorten the project timeline: site work is scheduled to begin this summer, and if the schedule holds we could all be eating sausage and pancakes in the new facil-

ity of a Sunday morning October afternoon.

"It's been a dream for a long time, and when you can finally see that it's going to become a reality, it's just a great feeling," says Larry Peebles, a 23-year veteran of the Grinnell Volunteer Fire Department and member of the mayor's task force assigned to work with FEH Associates on the facility design.

Peebles has carried the torch for the public safety building project for many years, both as a volunteer firefighter himself and as a former two-term city councilmember.

"The schedule right now says October 2009, and I think that's probably a fairly realistic picture - which means we should be in the new facility for the annual fireman's breakfast for 2009," he adds.

Waiting a few more months will be a pleasure, in a way, after the nearly 10 years of effort invested in getting the project to the verge of bidding.

"It's been a long road, I guess," Peebles says. "This project's been near and dear to me for a long time, and it's just really great to see it finally come into reality. We knew it was going to take awhile. They say all things come to those who wait. This proposal we've got out now is really going to satisfy a lot of needs, and not only for police, fire and safety: I think it's going to be something the town can be really proud of."

"It's even in a location where we're

going to be visible, right on Hwy. 6, one of the main thoroughfares through town. We will be much more visible to people than in our current location, and quite frankly I think it's a very very nice-looking facility and something the whole town can take pride in."

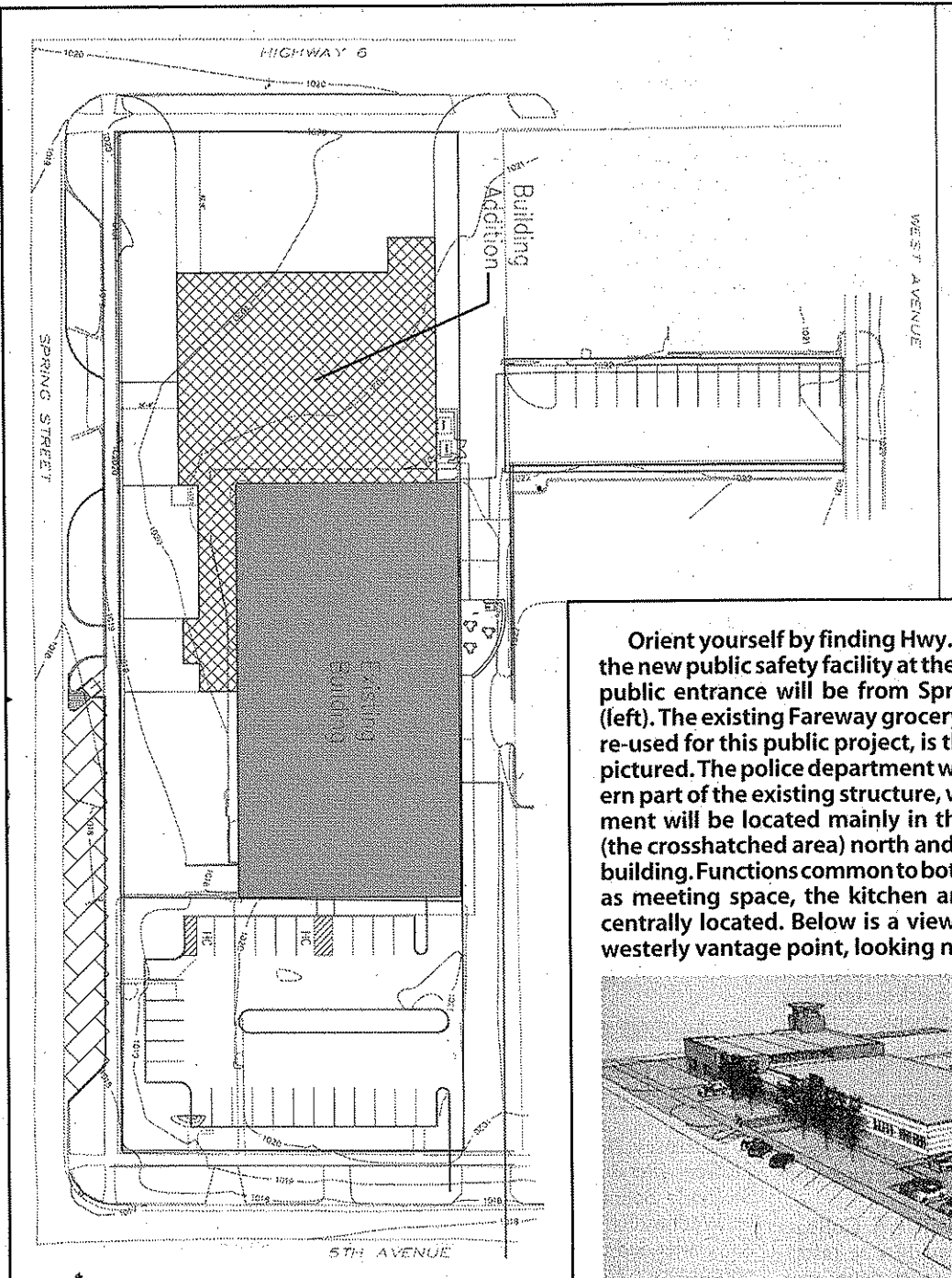
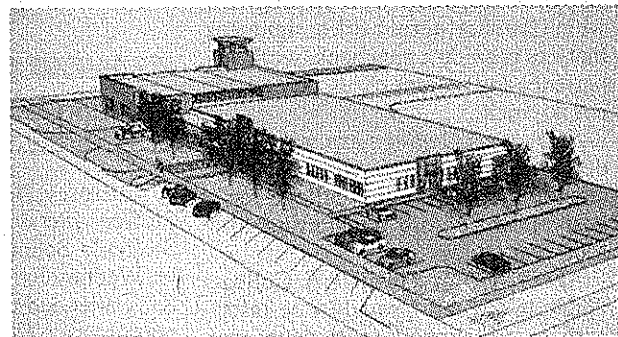
He hopes the community also takes pride in the city's good stewardship of the project, "not only from a cost-savings standpoint, but from a time standpoint and even from a green standpoint." In addition to employing a geothermal system, the design features lots of natural light which will cut electricity costs, as well as high-performance windows and a deliberate use of materials with a high recycled content.

"And being able to re-utilize the existing facility saves time, it saves money, it saves material, and you've got less material to haul away," he noted. "It's just a plus-plus situation."

The design, which City Manager Russ Behrens characterizes as 95 percent complete, employs the whole of the Fareway structure - with new mechanical systems, increased insulation, a more sloped roof and clad with insulated metal wall panels - as the bulk of

PUBLIC SAFETY BUILDING -
continued on page 6

Orient yourself by finding Hwy. 6 along the north of the new public safety facility at the top of the plan. The public entrance will be from Spring St., to the west (left). The existing Fareway grocery store, which will be re-used for this public project, is the dark shaded area pictured. The police department will occupy the southern part of the existing structure, while the fire department will be located mainly in the new construction (the crosshatched area) north and west of the existing building. Functions common to both departments, such as meeting space, the kitchen and dispatch, will be centrally located. Below is a view from a high south-westerly vantage point, looking northeast.



Public safety building -

continued from page 1

the facility.

A taller clear-span addition featuring strong use of daylighting will be added to the north of the existing structure and serve as the apparatus bay where fire trucks park at the ready. The five major fire truck bays will exist to the north, onto Sixth Ave. There are also two bays accommodating smaller vehicles which exit to the west, onto Spring St. Attached to the apparatus bay on the northeast will be a three-story tower that the fire department will use for training and for hanging its hoses.

Fire department offices and storage will be clustered near the apparatus bay, along with a decontamination area, restrooms, bunk space, and men's and women's locker areas which will serve both firefighters and the police department.

Police operations, on the other hand, will be clustered at the southern end of the facility. There will be offices for police command staff and patrol officers, along with a structurally hardened briefing room which can double as an emergency operations center and tornado shelter, toward the southwest. The southeastern portion is for booking, and features the addition of a sally port which creates a secure environment for prisoner transfer.

Areas jointly used by both departments, such as the kitchen, training and meeting space, dispatch and storage, will be located toward the center of the facility. The entrance for the public will also be located in the center of the western wall, on Spring St. Adjacent to the entrance will be a small public safety display area, where the department's beloved 1917 LaFrance fire truck, Old Betsy, will be on permanent display. Betsy's bay will be equipped with a glass paned overhead garage door, so that she can step out to perform her venerable parade functions.

There will be public parking on Spring St., parking for squad cars in a lot to the south of the existing building, and parking for volunteer firefighters in the current city lot north of Hardee's. The city is also working on abandoning the southern two-thirds of the alley to the facility's east, leaving the north-

ern third open but providing an additional safety buffer along the back of the building. That option would also present the possibility of adding green space there, as well as an outdoor space connected to the fire department's day room.

Moving a block north and away from the size and design constraints of the current 50-year-old structure, Grinnell Police Chief Jody Matherly says, will translate into substantial improvements in the efficiency and safety of departmental operations.

"The textbooks tell you, don't think about the process you're using now; think about the process you want to use in the future. So we are trying to think about how we want to conduct business in the future to be more efficient."

In the current structure, he acknowledges, efficiency is an uphill battle: "Things are not filed properly, not stored properly, not near the person they should be near to get the job done. So we're trying to think of what is the best-case scenario for everybody involved - all the functions we do, and what you need at your fingertips."

Technology will play a key role in the future, and staff at the department has begun archiving documents digitally toward that end. Having a technology expert assist in the planning for the new facility is also important, Matherly says, as the department organizes for a computerized and automated future where many critical functions are done "better, faster and cheaper."

But "bigger than that," Matherly says, "is that the safety aspect of this new building will be many times safer than what we're in now for citizens, for employees, for victims, for everybody involved in our system."

The introduction of a sally port - a small garage stall which allows a squad car transporting a prisoner can pull into a closed, secured area where an officer can move that individual into a booking or cell area rather than using a parking lot for transfer - is one such new safety feature. Traffic patterns inside the new public safety building are designed with an eye to prisoner movement as well, a topic Matherly says is "much more complicated than what it appears to the layman."

"Now, in this building, prisoners are moved in areas where there are victims

nearby, civilian staff, volunteer firefighters: they should not be exposed to somebody under arrest - that can be a safety issue, but we don't have any choice right now," he says, noting that all rooms in the current police department are located off a single L-shaped hall.

Particularly with crime victims, Matherly says, "we're in a situation now where they could certainly possibly see or hear somebody who has committed a crime against them, and that's not fair. There's enough stress when you're victimized, you certainly don't need to expose them to anything else."

Matherly added that he thinks the city is making smart use of its money - "We're doing this as cheap as we can and it's still going to be a great facility" - and that up-to-date facilities can help with recruitment and retention of employees.

"If I'm a kid out of college and looking for a career, and I visit a place that's efficient and advanced and well taken-care-of with the obvious support of the community - which is what this facility stands for - versus an old facility on its last legs and using duct tape to keep it together, I'm going to go with the place that shows community support. Grinnell has done that to show these folks we've got a great community and they stand behind us and do what they can for us within their resources."

"Your police department and fire department - that's the front door of your community," he continued, "and this is truly going to be a focal point. People stop and ask us directions, people stop to ask where are good neighborhoods where we can move, where's a good place to eat. Out-of-towners visit us first many many times, because we're open when they're arriving. It's certainly going to be a proud thing for the community to have people stop by here and see this great facility."

"I can tell you I am very excited about this project - and I say that with a little bit of apprehension. As thorough as we have been, as much attention as we have put in on this, we still have a long way to go and a lot of decision to be made," Matherly said. "There will be snafus that occur: that's just a fact of life."

But the chief is up for the task, focused on his new mantra: 1020 Spring

- the department's future address.

"I've already got that deeply embedded in my mind. I eat, sleep and drink this project. I'm having a blast with it, and I can tell you: it's something the community can be proud of for the next 50 to 100 years."

Fire Chief Dan Sicard also views the attention to myriad details "a little hectic," but is quick to add his great enthusiasm.

"It's very exciting. The volunteers are fully behind this and very happy with the way this is going - Larry Peebles has been a great representative for them on this committee," Sicard observed. "We're doing the best we can do to get as much as we can out of every dollar, and it seems to be working."

"Working with Jody is an easy task," he adds of his counterpart in the police department. "We seem to be on the same page about what we want to do, and that has made things a lot easier."

Room to work, train and properly accommodate volunteers are the topics uppermost in Sicard's mind as he looks ahead to the new facility.

"It's going to make it a lot easier for us getting around and getting our work done inside the station," he says. "With that training tower, there are all types of training opportunities available to us - it's just phenomenal we can have this. We can move hoses through there, practice using ladders, confined space rescue. We won't be able to burn in there, but we will be able to use theatrical smoke" to train volunteers on what types of situations they may encounter on fire calls. There is also a tunnel under the building, which presents another confined space training opportunity for a crew which trains relentlessly to be ready to respond.

"We will take advantage of every little piece we can for that," Sicard says.

The chief is also very happy that the new facility will welcome the volunteers. For the first time, volunteer firefighters will have their own lockers at the station where they can keep a spare pair of clothes, so they don't have to head home in the same clothes they fought a fire or chemical spill in. There will be a decontamination area, for cleaning clothes and equipment exposed to hazardous materials.

A day room which welcomes volun-

teers to spend free time pays added dividends, Sicard says: "They do hang out at the station a bit if there's a comfortable place to do that, and we encourage that. Then they're there if a fire call comes in."

Dedicated volunteers in future will also find bunk rooms to sleep during times of trouble. "During the ice storm, for example, we had volunteers sleeping here overnight," Sicard says. "We were busy enough, they didn't want to drive back and forth in bad weather, and at that time they were literally sleeping in the fire trucks or between the trucks. This new station will have bunk rooms so they can sleep more comfortably, and it also gives room for future growth: if we actually move into 24-hour shifts, we will have firefighters sleeping here."

Anyone who has ever been in the current station's apparatus bay knows that the fire truck drivers perform miracles daily parking and exiting all the city's equipment - huge trucks parked bumper to bumper, just inches apart - in a space long since outgrown. Parking in the new apparatus bay will be less of an adventure, and much more efficient.

"When there's a fire call, we show up one way or another," Sicard says, "so the public may not see some of the impact that will happen as a result of that apparatus bay. But being able to get out quicker without having to move another truck first, for example, depending on the call situation - that slows us down. With this set-up, we won't have to do that. Simple things like that make a difference."

As a supervisor whose operations depends so heavily on volunteers, Sicard sees the new station as bulwarking the department on the recruiting front as well.

"It's usually the norm, when you have a new facility, it tends to draw people's attention toward your organization," he says. "This shows the community's commitment to your police and fire departments, and it's a lot easier to convince someone to come work for you when they see that the community's committed to you. Those of us who live here know the community has always supported us, but for someone coming from the outside - the old building wasn't an inviting place, and they may not have gotten that impression."

"A nice work place to go to does make work just that much more enjoyable," he adds.

He also looks forward to "what's going to be a really beautiful museum, set up with Old Betsy as a showpiece right at the entrance." He said the police and fire departments would work together on the museum, which could display photos and old equipment, and could also serve as memorial space for public safety personnel killed in the line of duty.

Carmann, of FEH Associates, believes that in addition to its functional aspects the fire department's training tower will add an interesting aesthetic, as well. At three stories high, it will rise above its surroundings and its translucent fiberglass panels, which allow in sunlight by day, at night will become "a glowing beacon - a strong architectural element," he noted. He also said that the design calls for "quite a bit of green space" along the Spring St. side of the new facility. Carmann was aided by FEH colleagues Denny Sharp and Yolanda Vetsch in the presentation Tuesday.

Design on the facility should be finalized by mid-February, Carmann said. The city plans to have the project ready to bid by May 1; to award bids in June or July; and begin site work yet this summer.

To learn about the facility in more detail, you can watch the re-broadcast of the city council meeting where FEH made its presentation on local access cable channel GET-12 Friday through Monday, Jan. 25-28, at 11 a.m., and Tuesday through Thursday, Jan. 29-31, at 11 a.m. and 7 p.m.

In addition to Matherly, Peebles and Sicard, Mayor Gordon Canfield's Safety Building Task Force includes - in addition to the mayor himself - current city council members Larry Wilson, Byron Worley, Jim White and Oliva Wright, as well as Jo Wray, Becky Petig, Otto Hall, Montie Redenius, Rick Whitney, Ray Spriggs, Theresa Petersen, Gary Glandon, Dick Ritter, Larry German, and Scott Arnold.

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