



Clay County Board of Commissioners

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PRESS RELEASE

April 27, 2021

A Declaration of Necessity was passed by the Clay County Commission to provide a vote to allow the County to borrow money by issuing its General Obligation Bonds in an amount not exceeding \$41,000,000 for the purpose of: New Jail, Law Enforcement Safety Center, Courts, Government Services, Land Acquisition Costs, and current Courthouse Stabilization and Preservation.

This is a letter of support for this project signed by the majority of the Clay County Commission. We are living in the 21st Century with very different concerns than over 100 years ago when our courthouse was built. The Commission recognizes that the history and beauty of our existing courthouse is to be taken seriously and preserved for use. However, the County needs have outgrown the current facility and the costs completely renovate and add necessary expansion are excessive to allow for providing adequate elevator, safety entrance and personnel space to the existing courthouse to meet the needs is at a minimum \$12 million dollars over the cost of building new.

The Commission began seriously studying this issue in June 2016 by looking to replace and upgrade phones, technology, and safety protocols for the courthouse. The reality of fixing or correcting these issues only identified deeper and more extensive issues: need to replace the jail, overcrowding in cramped spaces for most other employees and lack of spaces to provide adequate services. Plumbing, heating, air handling, elevator, code and ADA compliant access and facilities are woefully inadequate. The Commission hired a consultant to identify and make recommendations for the Courthouse safety needs. With each meeting with the consultant, the problems identified increased and the projected expense increased. As the project expanded, the Commission advertised for a citizen's committee and received sixteen letters of interest from highly qualified residents to serve on the Clay County Courthouse, Jail, and Law Enforcement Facility Planning Committee. Seven voting members and three non-voting members were selected to serve on the committee.

As the scope and decisions expanded, the Commission hired TEGRA Group, led by Dick Strassburg. TEGRA works as an owner's representative / consultant / project manager for major Real Estate construction projects. The Committee has met for two and half years visiting and reviewing comparable facilities and further identifying Clay County needs and costs. The Committee recommended the construction of a new comprehensive courthouse, court, jail, and law enforcement facility.

All commissioners and most of the public agree and understand the need to build a new jail. Closing the Clay County Jail without replacement will not provide cost savings. The County cost will increase to approximately \$1.2 million annually within 2 to 5 years of jail closure. In addition, the law enforcement center does not meet the minimum national and state standards for law enforcement for Clay County

and the City of Vermillion. From receiving the public, to transfer of clients, to space and personal hygiene, a facility designed for today and for future needs will provide safety and greater safety and service for personnel and clients.

The alternative to new jail construction is to transport inmates to other county jails, some over 75 miles away and in neighboring states. The Clay County annual cost for housing inmates in other facilities are estimated at over \$700,000 (in today's dollars). Jails in the area generally charge between \$70 and \$100 per day housing costs per inmate. It has been stated that a neighboring county would be happy to have Clay County pay for the expansion of their jail through the revenue generated by fees Clay County would pay for inmate boarding at their jail. This cost estimate does not include the expense of officers and vehicles on the road and the loss of safety protection services within Clay County as a result.

The choice to build new has been a difficult one. The Commission and Committee recognize that the building of new integrated facilities will provide healthier, enhanced ADA access, and more efficient services to the public and greatly improve workspace for personnel. No longer will those participating in trials need to stand together in a hall while waiting for court to begin. No longer will jail clients need to be transported to other facilities to be housed, or to enter the public areas of the courthouse for court appearances. Space and safety will be provided for personnel; no longer will employees need to have offices in vaults, or trip over the maze of wiring between desks, or need individual heaters to keep warm. Telephones and technology will function properly.

The Commissioners are working on replacement of the roof and other necessary repairs to keep the Historic Courthouse in good condition. The County is looking for alternative uses and asks your assistance toward finding a future life of the Courthouse. Many ideas have been offered and will be considered for the future Courthouse building use. Many possibilities can be made into reality and will maintain its prominence in downtown Vermillion.

Letting go of the past and accepting change is difficult. Service efficiency and total price for a county that has approximately 26% poverty rate requires we choose the least expensive and most efficient choice.

Please help us to grow into the 21st Century and vote to pass the Declaration of Necessity.

Sincerely,

Travis Mockler, Chairman
Phyllis Packard, Vice-Chair
Micheal Manning, Commissioner
Richard Hammond, Commissioner