

To: Portage County Board Supervisors  
Re: **City/County Property Swap**

August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Attached to this correspondence you will find my memo to the City of Stevens Point Finance Committee and a memo to the same body from Alder Tori Jennings (First District). I read my memo into the record at the committee's meeting last night, and I was joined at the meeting by Chair Haga and Supervisors Miresse, Medin, and Johnson. Supervisor Johnson, as you know, is also the City Council President and the Vice-Chair of the City Finance Committee. This was the city's first public discussion of their proposal in the six months that we have been exploring it as an option for the county's long-term planning.

From the start of this discussion, county staff and leadership were very deliberate in how we approached the ideas associated with the proposal. We noted that as the final decision makers, both legislative bodies needed to be on the same page if we were to move forward. We would not entertain anything until we knew that the City Council was "on board" as well as open and willing to moving forward with the proposal. The city held a closed-session meeting to discuss their proposal, and that led to the council's willingness to move forward—and the proposal itself—being communicated to the full county board. At the June 18<sup>th</sup> County Board meeting, we learned that the council was not unanimous in its support of the proposal.

The reason I mention this is to inform the public and others as to why the county believed that there was support for this proposal and because this proposal has unfortunately generated a lot of misinformation that has weaved through the community and left confusion in its wake.

At the end of its discussion, the City Finance Committee requested that the city's proposal be put on the next council agenda for discussion and possible action. It seems likely, based on the comments at last night's meeting, that the city will withdraw its proposal, at least in part. Regardless of the outcome, we must remain steadfast in our commitment to finding resolution for long-standing infrastructure issues or find ourselves reacting to unfortunate circumstance instead of being proactive about known problems.

I urge you as a body to remain open-minded about working with the city, as they can be a strong partner and the city will have a role to play no matter what we do. I believe that, as public servants, we should wholeheartedly pursue collaborative efforts whenever and wherever possible. We are also in an era for local government when working together through constructive dialogue and strong partnerships is going to be required if we are to survive a state-driven status quo that is not sustainable in the long-term.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Holman".

Chris Holman  
Portage County Executive



TO: Finance Committee (City of Stevens Point)

Subject: **City/County Property Exchange**

CC: Mayor Wiza; Comptroller-Treasurer Ladick; Attorney Beveridge; Director Ostrowski;  
Council President Johnson; Portage County Board of Supervisors

Date: 8/12/2019

Good Evening,

Below are a few bullet points that I hope will shed some light on this conversation from the county's perspective. If you, anyone you know, or anyone you know of has any follow-up questions or comments, I am happy to continue setting up meetings, phone calls, or in-person discussions to address them.

My contact information is at the bottom of this page.

1. Thank you for holding the meeting. It has been nearly six months now where the county has discussed the various possibilities within the city's land swap proposal. The county has not moved out of the conceptual stage of planning because of the uncertainty many feel in the absence of a concrete discussion within the city about its proposal and the County Board's recent 13-10 vote.
2. We have invested staff time and several thousand dollars into investigating the proposal because it came to us from all three areas you'd want to hear from; The City Council, The Mayor, and City Staff. This lent it the credibility we needed to have in order to entertain exploring the proposal in concept.
3. No matter what the city decides on this issue, I remain committed to identifying all areas where collaborative, mutually-beneficial efforts can be explored. We are already in an era for local government where longer-term survival will hinge upon our finding ways to work with each other.
4. Many frame this conversation as "this or that" and despite what some have said, I am most interested in the dialogue that's needed to move the conversation forward in a "if this, then that" or "if not this, then that" approach. The Kettering Foundation, speaks to this style better than anyone.
5. The county has—most recently—been working on these questions since April 2018, when the county board voted to move forward with the concept exploration of a downtown location. The cost estimates for a downtown project were reported to the County Board earlier this year, and I explained that aside from possible complications with the available space, the cost estimates given to us were not numbers we could responsibly work with. Inaction from the county coupled with cost escalations over time means that the overall cost has increased and will likely continue to do so.
6. If the city withdraws its proposal framework, the county will move on. Deteriorating infrastructure doesn't care what any of us think, so what's most important is that we look at our deficiencies and address them. As we both seek to do so, there will likely be other opportunities to explore.

7. It's important to note that every step along this path has been approved by county committees and the county board and with implicit support from the city. The county held 10 publicly-noticed meetings on this topic prior to the June 18<sup>th</sup> County Board meeting, where it was discussed and voted upon. Aside from tonight's meeting, the August 6<sup>th</sup> Space & Properties meeting was the most recent time this topic has been discussed. We continue to try and create opportunities for more public engagement, and as this conversation evolves over time, please keep an eye out for them.

All information relating to this topic is also maintained and updated on the Portage County website. You can find it by clicking on "Current Projects" in the "In the Spotlight" section on the home page. Then, click on "New Government Facility Project."

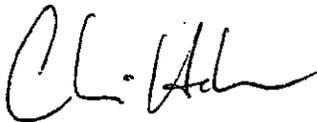
Date	Public Meeting or Media Release
March 1	Joint Press Release on the Property Swap Proposal
March 11	City Finance Committee—Closed Session
March 19	Portage County Board—Closed Session
March 28	Annex Meeting (Public Outreach #1)
April 2	County Space & Properties Committee
April 16	Portage County Board
April 26	Town of Pine Grove (Public Outreach #2)
April 30	Village of Junction City (Public Outreach #3)
May 1	Village of Rosholt (Public Outreach #4)
May 7	Village of Plover (Public Outreach #5)
May 9	Village of Amherst (Public Outreach #6)
May 21	Portage County Board
June 4	County Space & Properties Committee
June 18	Portage County Gazette Article ("A Few Thoughts On Tonight's Meeting")
June 18	Portage County Board
August 6	County Space & Properties Committee
August 12	City Finance Committee

Where are we now? We are still in the preliminary/conceptual phase (i.e. no major steps taken). To be clear, this is the terminology that the architects we've been working with use to describe where we are/have been in the process and are not arbitrary descriptors. Regrettably, there has been some confusion on this point. Overall, a decision on anything related to infrastructure does not seem to be on the horizon at this time.

There is clearly a need for more constructive dialogue if we are to consider any next steps, and absent 19 county board supervisors agreeing to a starting point for our long-term planning, we will continue our holding pattern for the time being. That said, as I will continue to note, infrastructural issues don't care if people can agree or not. They will continue to worsen until we do something to resolve them.

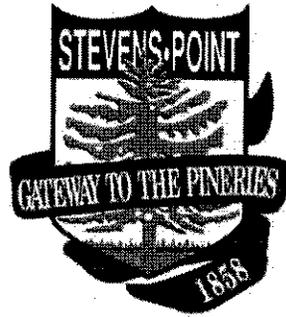
I hope these clarifying remarks can play a constructive role in your conversation today and moving forward, and I am always happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you,



Chris Holman  
Portage County Executive

City of Stevens Point  
1515 Strongs Avenue  
Stevens Point, WI 54481-3594



## MEMORANDUM

To: Finance Committee  
From: Alder Tori Jennings  
Subject: City/County Property Exchange  
Cc: Alder Phillips (Chair); Mayor Wiza; Comptroller Treasurer Corey Ladick; Attorney Beveridge;  
Director Ostrowski; President Johnson  
Date: 8/5/2019

The proposed city/county property exchange agreement or "land swap" would be among the most significant decisions made by the current City Council. A course is being charted for a permanent separation of city and county facilities following the Portage County Board of Supervisor's resolution allowing BWBR/Dewberry Architects to commence with the design development of a new court house, fleet garage and jail on 20-25 acres of greenfield in TID 9 (East Park Commerce Center). Yet no public discussion with City Council has taken place despite the wide-ranging financial, social, and environmental implications of the proposal. Strong leadership and careful decision-making by City Council members is required before more money is spent.

As background, Mayor Wiza issued a press release about the potential land swap on March 1. Common Council first learned about the idea during a closed Finance Committee session on March 11. Since no action was taken, no meeting minutes are available to the public; alders per state statute cannot share what they heard. On March 28, the first public forum about the possible swap was held at the Portage County Annex. Officials assured the large crowd that a land swap was merely "conceptual" and "very preliminary." Silence followed the public input session until June 18, when the County Executive advocated for a land swap in a PC Gazette article, and informed readers of possible action by the County Board of Supervisors that same evening.

The site under consideration for a land swap came about as a result of the Oso's Brewing project, which appears to have stalled. In 2018, the City exercised a right of purchase agreement for approximately 80 acres of greenfield in TID 9 at a cost of more than \$2.5 million. Roughly 20 acres was to be used for the Oso's project and the remaining +/- 50 acres for future development purposes. When City Council agreed to the 80 acre land purchase, the possibility that a non-taxable government facility might be placed there was not part of the discussion.

On June 18, Board Supervisors approved the design development resolution for a new county facility 13-10, a number insufficient to support borrowing even if the plan were to move forward in the future. In the short-term however, the resolution allows the County to reallocate the approximate \$95,000

previously approved for BWBR/Dewberry Architects to review existing concepts for facilities downtown. In other words, County financing earmarked for downtown may now be used to design a campus on the urban fringe near Crossroads Commons. If the new county facility project does not move forward, we may assume more funding will be needed to revisit plans for the downtown campus. Where will this money come from and how does this impact the City?

Limited information has been provided about the complexities and long-term implications associated with a land swap. Critical questions have been raised by some Board Supervisors and citizens alike about how moving county facilities to the urban fringe would affect residents and businesses, reshape our region for generations to come, and potentially make our city poorer in the process. These long-term, macro-level questions require thoughtful consideration. Fortunately, a good deal of information and research answers questions about the importance of government facilities in downtowns.

For example, reports and articles from UW-Extension, Yale Law School, and urban planning institutes around the country align on several key points about government buildings: (1) Buildings housing government functions should be easily accessible to the public via public transportation and adjacent to other services and buildings housing government functions (e.g. courthouses, post offices, libraries).<sup>1</sup> (2) Municipal buildings are important socially and economically to downtowns. Consequently, moving public facilities out of central business districts contributes to a “decline in retail activity as local people invest their energy and spending elsewhere.”<sup>2</sup> (3) A healthy downtown (which municipal buildings are an integral part) is a key revenue generator and makes a major contribution to the city’s bottom line and economic prosperity.<sup>3</sup>

Significant spending has taken place over the past two decades on feasibility studies, needs assessments, and design plans related to the Court House, City Hall and Law Enforcement Center. Most recently, the City spent \$9,375 on architectural services and environmental assessments for a new City Hall (which will not move forward) and purchased land at Arlington Place and Water Street for \$420,000. This is merely a fraction of the dollars spent by the City and County over the years. Purported cost savings of a new County facility on the urban fringe does not include infrastructure and long-term socio-economic or environmental costs. Open discussion and possible action by City Council should be considered before further spending takes place.



Tori L. Jennings  
Alder First District

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<sup>1</sup> [https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1692&context=fss\\_papers](https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1692&context=fss_papers)

<sup>2</sup> <https://cced.ces.uwex.edu/files/2014/12/DowntownCountySeatStudyFinal.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://plannersweb.com/2013/09/healthy-downtown-key-strong-community/>