

# Residents support, question plans for new town hall

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## Nearly 40 turn out to hear preliminary ideas

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*Renderings courtesy Town of Verona. A rendering of the outside of the proposed administrative/community building.*



Front View



*An aerial view of the initial town hall proposal shows the separate garage and administrative/community facilities, as well as a barn already on the property.*

There will still be some changes in the details, but Town of Verona residents were supportive of the preliminary plans for a new town hall Monday night.

Town officials held an informational meeting at the current town hall to hear feedback on an initial design of the building, which could break ground as soon as late summer. The new town hall will be located off County Hwy. PD west of Country View Road on land the Town Board purchased in December.

“One of the things I’m most excited about is this opportunity to set ourselves up for the long-term future in a facility that will serve the town very well,” Town Chair Dave Combs told the crowd of 40 packed into the board’s meeting room.

Since the December purchase of 43 acres for \$700,000, the town has worked with planners from the Cuningham Group to develop initial layouts for the new building.

Those initial designs call for a garage that is separate from the administrative building, a community room and about 40 parking spots.

Although the residents in attendance were generally supportive, they did question the proposed driveway location and how the building would be paid for.

Town officials said about \$300,000 remains in the fund set up for acquiring a new town hall



*The town hall campus from across Hwy. PD.*

that began in 2002, and the current town hall has been valued at \$220,000. That would account for more than half of the expected \$1 million cost of a new building.

The rest, town officials hope, can come from selling the roughly 33 acres that will not be used for the town hall. Combs said there has already been interest expressed in that land.

Some residents were concerned about the value of that land given zoning issues that might come up.

"The No. 1 thing you guys have to get an answer to (from the City of Verona and Dane County) ... is, 'We want to take 10 acres here, what can we do with the rest?'" said Town of Montrose resident Tom Duerst, who pays Town of Verona taxes because his farmland splits the towns. "Without that, you have no idea what it's worth."

But Combs assured Duerst and others that, "We'll be OK."

The driveway's proposed location is at the bottom of a hill, which also created some concern, as snowplows would have to exit onto Hwy. PD, which has a 55 mph speed limit. Town officials said they were open to

moving the driveway if necessary.

The new building would include three separate offices for the town's staff, plus a conference room for more private conversations, something the current town hall does not have. That would benefit personal issues, such as assessment disputes, and the Town Board.

"Currently when we have the board go into closed session, it's quite awkward," said clerk/treasurer John Wright. "In this scenario, the board members could ... go into the conference room and meet privately."

Wright also praised the better record-keeping the new building would have, saying the current storage is "not good."

Within that same building would be a board meeting room and a "community room" divided by a retractable wall that could be removed to serve larger groups of up to 150. That space could be open on weekends to host local non-profit groups or other local activities while keeping the office area locked.

Town resident Barbara Walker, who questioned the financing and the declining population in the last census during the meeting, said after the meeting she appreciated the town officials' work on the new building.

"(Town staff) know where they need storage and where they need stuff," Walker said, adding that the building should not be too "fancy." "It's going to be nice to have a real nice town hall."

The garage would include a place to store salt, possibly in a separate building, and would be large enough to hold all of the town's vehicles.

One of the bigger discussions of the night was what to do with the old buildings on the property, which formerly belonged to the Sharer family and includes a Triumph motorcycle shop that Combs said has asbestos in it.

Combs said an old barn on the property might be nice as a landmark, but would cost at least \$40,000-50,000 to renovate and bring up to code.

"It's a nice barn, but it's really hard to imagine how it would serve the needs of the town," Combs said.

Combs, whose term as chair will end in April, said he would support demolishing all of the structures, but that decision would be left up to the new board after the election.

The planning process has moved quickly, partly because the town had planning help from Epic.

"This has gone forward at a pretty quick pace," town Sup. Mark Geller said. "Within two days, they said, 'When would you like to start designing it?'"

The officials also explored ideas about brush collection and electronics disposal on site. No residents reacted especially strongly to those ideas, though some questioned how much the town has to do beyond its basic services of keeping roads clear and collecting taxes.

Town officials will take the feedback they heard from the meeting and move forward with planning.

Combs said there is lots of work to do before construction begins, including finalizing the funding options. The town has

traditionally avoided debt.