

## MAYORAL VETO-POLICE FACILITY RENOVATION

Five and a half years ago, I took a tour of the police facility as part of my orientation as a new Alderman. It was easy to see it was not a great place to work. It was cramped and dingy and surely needed some sprucing up.

I applaud the work of members of the Police Task Force who explored one possible solution to rectifying those issues. However, I cannot applaud this Council's rush to adopt the recommendations of the Task Force without performing a detailed analysis of which parts of the Task Force's recommendations are truly necessary, if any, and to the extent the Council determined that certain parts are necessary, whether there are alternatives available which would accomplish the same purpose at a lower cost.

Because I firmly believe that the vast majority of the proposed expenditures for this project are unnecessary or have lower cost alternatives available which will serve the same purpose, I am exercising my veto authority over the contract with Workmaster's, Inc. approved by the Council on November 7, 2012.

As a threshold matter, the proposal calls for the demolition of the building next door to City Hall on Courtland Avenue which the City purchased for more than \$600,000 so that a 1,500 square foot building can be constructed which will serve primarily as a storage area. However, the City currently has well over 6,000 square feet of vacant space in other buildings, the majority of which is in the former Public Works Service Center. Despite my repeated questioning, the

only reason that has been given why we cannot use the old Service Center is because it is too far away and would be inconvenient. On behalf of the City's beleaguered taxpayers, I am telling you that the inconvenience of a three-minute drive from City Hall is a terribly lame excuse for spending over \$1 million of their money without so much as a discussion of the alternatives.

It is not too late to consider that alternative.

I propose that this Council sustain my veto of this contract and take the time, on behalf of the taxpayers, to discuss selling the Courtland property and using some of the proceeds to retrofit the old Service Center to accommodate the space needs of the Police Department. The beauty of this plan is that it would provide extra space for the Department, much more than is provided in the Task Force's recommendation, thereby alleviating overcrowding in the present facility, and it would return the Courtland Avenue property to the property tax rolls, and it would save the taxpayers over \$1 million. It is this Council's duty and obligation to the taxpayers to consider this alternative before committing over a \$1 million of taxpayer money to a well-intentioned, yet one-track minded, plan.

It bears remembering that the current facility has passed every single health and safety inspection which has been conducted since I took office. Postponing this project, which is absolutely not critical, would wipe out most, if not all, of the remaining proposed increase in the property tax levy, and it could actually lead to a boost in this City's General Fund balance if the Courtland property is sold and returned to the property tax rolls. It is a win-win-win situation for

everybody. But if this Council goes through with this plan, there will be one big loser: the taxpayers.

Finally, let's keep in mind where the taxpayers stand on this issue. The Task Force's report highlighted the fact that 46% of the referendum voters in 2009 felt that some improvement in the facility was needed. That means 54% of the voters did not want to expend taxpayer funds to improve the facility. Certain members of this Council have seized on the results of another prior referendum regarding O'Hare to vote against any expenditure related to O'Hare. They said "the voters have spoken." Well, they spoke here as well. Why aren't you listening this time?

Again, there are lower-cost alternatives available to us. I ask the Council to do its job and explore them before committing over \$1 million of taxpayers' money against the taxpayers' wishes.