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By:

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Image: Plan for the new security entry system to City Hall and 54-B District Court

East Lansing City staff are recommending to City Council that hundreds of thousands of dollars be spent creating a new security system for our City Hall and court building. Under the proposal, all visitors to City Hall and the court would have to go through a metal detector staffed by an officer, whether visitors are coming to attend public meetings, pay real estate taxes or parking tickets, or serve on a jury.

This planned series of comprehensive security updates and site enhancements to the 54B District Court and City Hall first officially appeared before City Council earlier this year and is currently pending revision before it will be revisited for discussion and eventual vote by Council. Chief among the updates is reducing the number of public entrances to the building to one and installing a security checkpoint for all who enter the building, complete with magnetometer (metal detector) and armed guard.

As of June 23, 2015, the last time this was brought before Council, the anticipated cost was \$439,000 for infrastructure changes plus an additional \$90,000 per year in staffing costs for the manned entrance.

City staff's primary intention is to lock down 54B District Court (including the jail and police station), not to do so with City Hall. However, because the two share the same building, City Hall will also require security screening for all visitors entering the building for any reason – a court appearance, paying a water bill, purchasing yard waste bags and stickers, registering to vote, and so on.

At the April 14, 2015, City Council work session, City Manager George Lahanas opened his remarks by stating that discussions of upgrades to the 54B/City Hall facility to a "single access point" security have been going on for "about fifteen years." However, the project has been continually delayed and "stifled" for myriad reasons, including cost, changes in plans, the logistics of moving staff and offices, and more.

In a letter to Lahanas dated April 9 [2], 2015, Director of Parks, Recreation and Arts Tim McCaffrey wrote, "East Lansing City Hall and 54B District Court have been the most difficult facilities to secure. [?] The 54B District Court is one of the eight [third class district] courts [in Michigan] that does not conduct entrance screening." Additionally, he wrote that the East Lansing Police Department had "[secured] a magnetometer at no cost to the City." At the work session, Lahanas added that two magnetometers were acquired from the federal government and were going unused.

Matthew McGaughey, an architect with Mayotte Group, the City's contracted architecture firm for the project, explained that the building's southwest corner at the intersection of Linden and Abbot is the preferred single entry point. This is due to it already being large enough to accommodate the security checkpoint, as well as to its proximity to the elevators. (See renderings here [3], here [4], and here [5].) Other doors to the facility would require keycard access.

At the April 14 Council meeting, Mayor Pro Tem Diane Goddeeris expressed concern regarding the entrance and other aspects of the physical plan, particularly with regard to accessibility for people with mobility disabilities. (Restricting public entrance to the southwest corner only would put the entrance farther from current guest parking.) A brief exchange occurred between her and McGaughey regarding proposed handicap spaces designed to run parallel along Abbot Road in addition to those in the parking lot. Goddeeris emphasized that many of the visitors to City Hall are senior citizens, and that she wanted City Hall to be an "inviting place" for everyone.

Related to the potential addition of handicap accessible spaces to Abbot Road, Goddeeris asked about the cost breakdown for those specific spaces. Assistant Director of Parks, Recreation and Arts Wendy Longpre said that the presented \$439,000 didn't include an itemized breakdown of the site work (i.e., external work).

At the same meeting, Councilmember Ruth Beier asked Lahanas, "Can we even afford this?" She referenced an initial price tag of roughly half the proposed \$439,000, but Lahanas clarified that that lower figure had only included internal work to the building and not the site work. As for the \$90,000/year staffing costs, Lahanas described the armed guard position as part-time and

without benefits, likely to be filled by retired police officers or those of a similar caliber.

At the same meeting, Chief Judge Andrea Larkin also spoke as a follow-up to her March 19 ^[6] letter to Council. That letter stated that East Lansing's 54B Court is "one of very few courts [in Michigan] that have no security." She quoted a comment by the State Court Administrative Office's Court Security Specialist, who wrote:

"All governmental facilities (including courthouses) face a certain level of risk associated with various threats. [?] Regardless of the nature of the threat, government has a responsibility to limit or manage risks from these threats to the greatest extent possible. In light of recent tragic events involving various courts and court personnel, the vulnerability of our justice system, its employees, patrons, and the facilities need to be reviewed, enhanced, and improved."

Larkin also discussed threats of violence that she has received both at work and home, telling Council, "I think we've been lucky up to this point." Goddeeris sympathized with Larkin but stressed that she had outstanding questions regarding details and costs. Mayor Nathan Triplett said it was the City's obligation to protect the judges, jurors, and visitors.

Recent mass shootings and the September 11 terror attacks were regularly referenced throughout the discussion, both in the provided documents and at the work session.

At the time of the April 14 work session, the plan was to begin the project over this summer, with part of the cost being paid for by the current year's budget. Per McCaffrey's April 9 letter to Lahanas, the hope was for the upgrades to be "fully implemented by Friday, August 21."

Council revisited the topic at their next work session, on April 28. The discussion was much shorter than at the prior meeting, as it only centered on the proposed upgrades to the video monitoring system. Information Systems Manager Alan McCarrack presented a \$132,835 contract with Peripheral Vision. The proposal was to upgrade the existing 54B District Court and City Hall analog video surveillance system to an IP-based system and to improve security coverage. A resolution approving this contract was placed on the consent agenda of the May 6 Council meeting, at which time it passed.

Despite intending to complete the upgrades during this summer, no other portion of the proposal for upgrades returned to Council until the June 23 work session. At that meeting, McCaffrey and Longpre returned before Council to discuss external site work only, not the internal security upgrades. Following up on Goddeeris's concerns at the April 14 meeting, Longpre presented further breakdowns of the external site cost, which included: \$60,000 for safety and accessibility improvements in the north and east parking lots; \$20,000 for updating the Park Lane exit; \$55,000 for Abbot road improvements (handicap parking and sidewalk improvements); and \$45,000 for repaving the east parking lot. This totaled approximately \$180,000. Longpre suggested that deferring the paving of the east lot would reduce the cost of site work to about \$135,000.

In discussing building accessibility, Goddeeris asked about deliveries to the 54B District Court and City Hall. Longpre replied that all deliveries would go through security as well. However, it was later clarified that deliveries to the cadet desk could go directly to the cadet desk without being screened. The window to the cadet desk would be accessible 24-hours-a-day.

Lahanas clarified that internal updates were neither being discussed nor approved because of delays regarding decisions about the location of court staff in the building. Chief Judge Larkin had asked City staff to look into where the court staff would be located after the updates. Because of this, Lahanas and McCaffrey anticipated an additional 30-45 days of waiting for another proposed design, with additional time needed for estimates, renderings, costs, and an evaluation of the new proposal. In total, McCaffrey anticipated returning to Council for further discussion and approval in 60-90 days.

Based on this timeline, the proposed revised updates may be coming before Council soon, at which time we will provide continued coverage.

NOTE: With editorial permission, portions of this article were taken from previous ELi reports (see Council Capsules [here](#) [7], [here](#) [8], and [here](#) [9]).

Reminder: You can communicate with East Lansing's City Council in person at its weekly meetings or write to Council directly at council@cityofeastlansing.com [10]. You can speak or write on any issue involving the City, not only what is on the published agenda. (There is no City Council meeting this week because this Tuesday is the 5th Tuesday of the month.)

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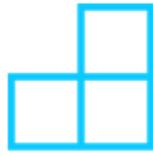
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