COON CREEK WATERSHED DISTRICT
Request for Board Action

MEETING DATE: August 24, 2015
AGENDA NUMBER: 14
ITEM: Review and Update of Office Space Need & Requirements

POLICY IMPACT: Discussion
FISCAL IMPACT: Budgeted

REQUEST
Review, discuss & approve the problem statement and the goals and objectives

BACKGROUND
In July the Board adopted a general process for addressing the acquisition and construction of office space. As we move through the process, staff is discovering some details that need to be documented.

Below is a statement of the problem or reason why we are searching for our own space and the goals and objectives to be accomplished through ownership

PROBLEM
The Coon Creek Watershed District was established in 1959 as a public body:
1. To protect the health and safety of the present and future people that live, and will live, within the watershed.
2. To provide for opportunities and uses of the water and related natural resources of the watershed which are demanded and appropriate for the area. Appropriate refers to the natural ability of the water and related resources to continue to perform and function on their own or with a minimum subsidy or cost to the public at large;
3. To prevent unacceptable damage to the water and related natural resources of the watershed. Unacceptable here refers to the decreasing or diminishing the ability of the water and related resources to continue to perform and function on their own in perpetuity (self-sustaining or self-perpetuating or self-referencing).
4. To develop and implement a uniform program for water and related land management within the watershed of Coon Creek.

The District has leased meeting and office space for the past 30 years. In addition to paying rent, the District has been forced to move or undergo the disruption of building construction due either because of building sale or the need to expand or change its offices on at least five different occasions, triggering either a disruption of services or a decline in productivity.
In 2015 the District, as part of its annual reporting requirements conducted “An Assessment of Progress in Implementing the Comprehensive Watershed Plan and the Program Needs and Adjustments to Ensure Success”. Part of that assessment looked at the future demands on the water resources of the District and emphasized the need to properly staff and to secure permanent office space for the District.

BUILDING REQUIREMENTS

GOAL:
To locate Watershed District facilities at a site that enables the District to effectively accomplish its mission and serve the public.

OBJECTIVES:
1. To respond to increased or newly assigned mission responsibilities
2. To provide for increased staff
3. To improve operational efficiencies and to reduce operation and maintenance costs
4. To correct or to mitigate existing code and/or accessibility deficiencies
5. To enhance employees’ safety and environmental conditions
6. To replace existing facilities that are outdated or deteriorated, or that are no longer available to the District because of lease expiration or similar cause.

ALTERNATIVES EXPLORED
Six alternatives have been explored and discussed formally and informally over the past three years:
1. Staying the same (No growth in staff, programs or space).
2. Continue to rent – Expand/Change Location as Need Arises
3. Collocate with a state, or local government unit when missions are compatible and improved coordination can be achieved.
4. Locate in a government owned facility (City Hall or Public Works)
5. Build Own Facility
6. Some combination of above

Discussion
Staying the same (No growth in staff, programs or Space):
Remaining the same is not considered either feasible or prudent.

This alternative is not feasible because both the State and Federal Governments have adopted a “watershed approach” in addressing critical issues such as flooding, water quality and watersheds contributing to municipal drinking water supplies. Coon creek has already been identified by both levels of government for all three of these issues and concerns
This alternative is not prudent because the District provides an integrated source of water management expertise and an economy of scale in its service to the people of the watershed and the municipalities which manage the majority of public service infrastructure on which those people depend.

**Continue to rent – Expand/Change Location as Need Arises:**
Continuing to rent and seeking new office space as responsibilities, programs and staff change is not feasible or prudent.

The feasibility of this alternative is directly related to the availability of office space for rent, the degree to which that space can be modified to accommodate the District need and the availability of staff time to search and vet the potential spaces.

This alternative is not prudent because the additional time and expense of searching for space and paying rent is a waste of public funds, may very well result in substandard space that will lead to decreased and inferior service to the citizens of the District.

**Collocate with State, or a local government unit when missions are compatible and improved coordination can be achieved (Anoka Conservation District)**
This alternative was explored in 2011-2012 with possible colocation with the Anoka Conservation District soon after their purchase of the present building in Ham Lake. The similar mission of the agencies and their history of financial and technical collaboration made this alternative appealing.

However, numerous barriers prevented this alternative from being realized including but not limited to:
1. Square footage of space available
2. Practical ability to share equipment and support services because of separate buildings.

**Locate in Government Owned Facility (City Hall or Public Works)**
This alternative was explored in 2011-2012 with the City of Blaine. When the current city hall was constructed, the then City Engineer advocated that space be created on the top floor as a potential location for the District. In 2012 the City was asked if space might be available. The City Council’s response was that the city did not want to compete with the private sector and would prefer not to lease space to the District.

This alternative was explored again in 2015 when two sites, both belonging to Anoka County, were identified and discussed:
1. Bunker Lake Bld west of the BNRR Tracks & east of the current Anoka County Highway Department. This alternative was not feasible because the available land is 6(f) under the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the County is not able to assist with mitigation.
2. The current Visitor Center at Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park. This feasibility of this alternative is currently being explored.
**Build Own Facility**
This alternative was originally discussed in 1992 during a long range strategic planning exercise. More recently the alternative was explicitly discussed in spring, 2015 and as part of the 2016 budget process. This alternative is seen as both feasible and prudent.

**This alternative is feasible** because the District currently has the authority, tax capacity capability to collect and retain funds to build or finance construction of a building.

**This alternative is prudent** because it represents an elimination of a sunk cost to the public and the creation of a public asset.

**RECOMMENDATION**
Review, discuss & endorse