



Chamber, EDC support courthouse renovation

By Tracy Overstreet

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The Grand Island Area Economic Development Corp. (EDC) and the Grand Island Area Chamber of Commerce both went on record Tuesday in favor of an addition to the existing Hall County Courthouse.

Both groups opposed building a new courthouse at another location.

“... moving the courthouse out of downtown would be an economic train wreck,” EDC President Randy Gard told the Hall County board Tuesday. “Doing the right thing is renovation and expansion at the current location.”

The courthouse issue was not on the county board’s meeting agenda Tuesday, but Gard and chamber board member Terry Pfeifer were allowed to speak about the courthouse under the county’s “public participation” item on the agenda.

Supervisors had planned to talk about the courthouse during a 6 p.m. public meeting Tuesday at Grand Island City Hall, but that meeting was postponed due to severe weather concerns.

Hall County board Chairman Bob



Randy Gard

McFarland said the courthouse meeting will be rescheduled and he will inform the public of the date, time and place.

At that meeting, the board planned to detail the two options it has been studying to add five courtrooms in a new addition and to convert two existing county courtrooms into a combined district courtroom on the second floor of the existing courthouse.

The options are called B-1, an addition directly onto the east side of the existing 1904 courthouse, and B-3, an addition in the south parking lot that would be connected to the courthouse via a corridor.

In the midst of previous discussions, Supervisor Steve Schuppan raised questions about the cost of new construction and suggested it may be money better spent to move the entire courthouse function to land the county owns east of town at the county jail site.

The idea raised concerns among the Hall County legal community and

the Hall County Historical Society, both of which were planning to be represented at the Tuesday evening meeting.

Pfeifer said courthouses are an integral part of every community’s history and heritage. Hall County’s courthouse has served the county well for the past 110 years.

“The building itself is a symbol and landmark, not only because of its awesome architecture, but for what happens within its walls,” Pfeifer told supervisors Tuesday morning. “It is truly a ‘court’ house — the seat of justice where judges, prosecutors, court staff and others protect our liberties and provide for the public safety.”

Pfeifer said he proudly looks out at the view of the courthouse from his downtown office and hopes it won’t change to a view of the “old courthouse.”

“Moving the judicial function from the courthouse is, in fact, taking ‘court’ out of the courthouse,” Pfeifer said. “It would remove the heart from the most important symbol of our county.”

The supervisors had no reaction to Gard’s and Pfeifer’s testimony.