

## **M.C. Council should act quickly on study of Police Department (Globe Gazette Editorial)**

Here's a quote that may sound familiar:

“The focus of enforcement, including DARE officers, school resource officers, community policing officers and drug investigators, has expanded the space needs of the department. The police force is 20 percent larger than it was 25 years ago and now includes female officers for which no locker rooms are available.”

It's from Mason City Police Chief David Ellingson — in 2004.

That's when residents in Mason City and Cerro Gordo County were asked to approve a joint law enforcement center that would have solved a multitude of problems.

It was turned down. But obviously, the problems haven't gone away, either for the Police Department or Cerro Gordo County Sheriff's Department.

County supervisors turned to voters again in September, and they approved a \$13 million proposal for a new jail/sheriff's department to be built west of Mason City on county-owned land. That should do the department nicely for years to come.

Not so with the Police Department. Ellingson's words ring as true today as they did in 2004.

That's why we urge the City Council to find out what the department needs, then act toward meeting those needs — including a public bonding referendum if necessary.

The council took the first step in that direction Tuesday in its approval of the 2006-07 city budget. Council members slashed \$580,000 from a proposed \$700,000 to remodel the Police Department. It was half of a two-year proposed expense to refurbish the building and get rid of lead contamination in the basement.

Councilman Jeff Marsters gets a gold star for questioning spending that much money when a new police building might be needed soon.

Councilman Scott Tornquist gets another gold star for suggesting some money be left in the budget for what he describes as a feasibility study of the department's needs.

On a 4-2 vote, the council left in enough money to take care of the lead problems and also left money for that feasibility study.

Some of the problems are glaring. As Ellingson's quote suggests, operating a police department is far more complex than it was even a few years ago.

Our female law officers don't have appropriate facilities. That's great, eh? They go out on some rough-and-tumble call and get dirty or injured and don't even have an appropriate locker room, just a 10-by-10-foot area that used to be an exercise room. That's not fair to the four women officers on the force.

So, as we put it all together, it seems a new facility may be needed. We backed the joint city-county proposal in 2004, then the county issue in September. We have a hunch that a new Police Department headquarters will be the way to go now.

The council shouldn't wait on this one. The feasibility study should be set in motion. If a referendum is the answer, so be it.

Just as county residents did in approving the jail complex, we think city residents would understand the Police Department's needs and give our officers the first-rate facility they deserve.