

WABASHA CITY COUNCIL

Wabasha City Hall, 900 Hiwatha Dr E., Wabasha MN 55981

Wednesday, September 17, 2025

Workshop 4:15 PM

1. Workshop Agenda
2. Discuss Building Survey Results and Next Steps

City Council Workshop

2.

Meeting Date: 09/17/2025

ITEM TITLE: Discuss Building Survey Results and Next Steps

DEPARTMENT: Administration

PURPOSE:

ITEM SUMMARY:

City Administrator Gregerson will present survey results. Ambulance Director Marking will add additional research. Council to discuss next steps.

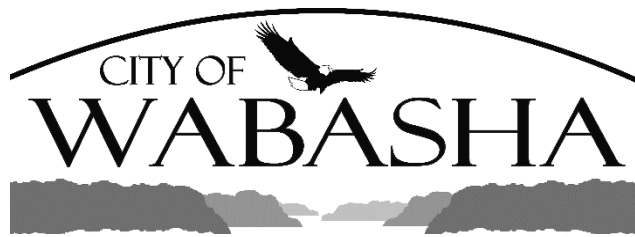
Taken as a whole, majority respondents were against all options. 53% did not support addressing the ambulance only, 64% did not support addressing ambulance and city hall, 62% did not support a combined building. Gregerson believes that a referendum would be difficult to pass in the context of the survey responses. Removing respondents against all options, 42% of respondents supported addressing the ambulance only, only 29% supported ambulance and city hall (still a majority against that option), and 49% supports a combine building. So still no options were favored by survey respondents.

Digging into the survey comments here were some questions and comments:

- Comments suggested we look at the ambulance combining with the hospital
- Or look at expanding CJC space or lease space within the CJC for more government offices.
- Many comments that it seemed like based on existing condition the Ambulance was in the most need and that existing facilities for police and city hall were adequate.
- Build costs seem high, can those be reduced through renovation? Or find lower build costs?
- Find other ways to fund it other than property taxes
- Renovate existing buildings to save money
- Police is better served at CJC and that's what you promised us they would go
- What is the future of the ambulance? Will it be with the City or be privatized in the future? If privatized, should we be investing money in a new building?
- Comments that supported combined building discussed that it would be cheaper than multiple facilities and would be an efficient way to use property. Noted the need for parking.
- Some comments that first responders should not be with City Hall.
- 35 comments about people struggling in Wabasha to pay property taxes. And even a few hundred dollar a year adding on is too much. Concern about property taxes increasing in the last few years.
- I need more information and research- what are the yearly operating costs? Figure out less costly grading cost. Build a year round indoor pool.
- What will happen to the old properties?

Attachments

Survey Results Memo



To: Wabasha City Council, Ambulance Commission

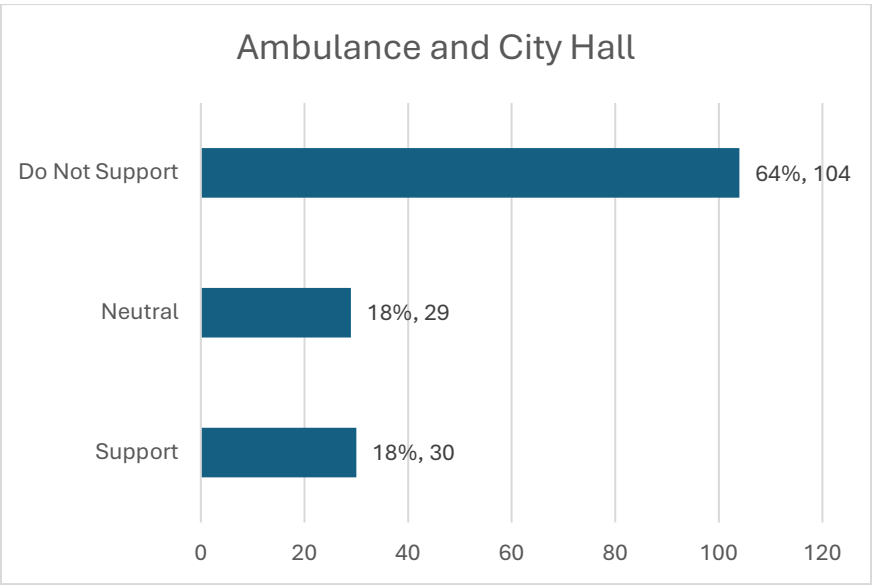
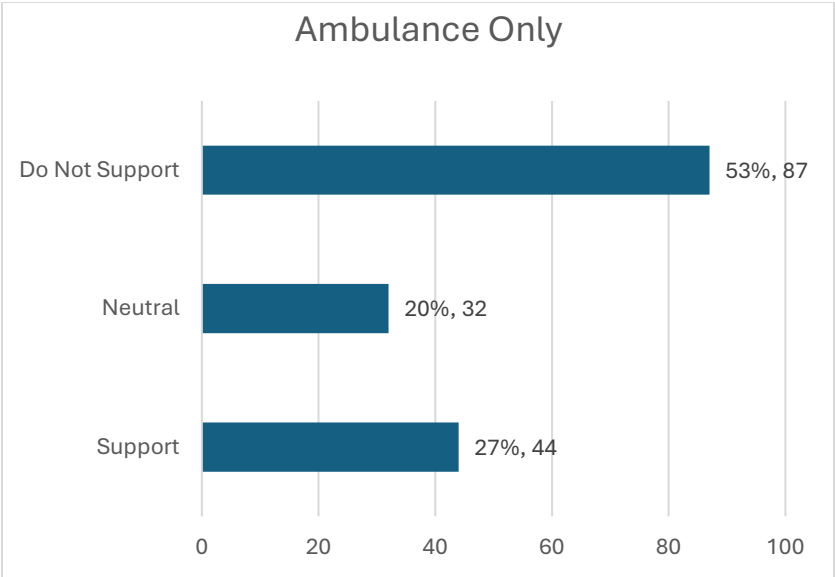
From: Caroline Gregerson, City Administrator

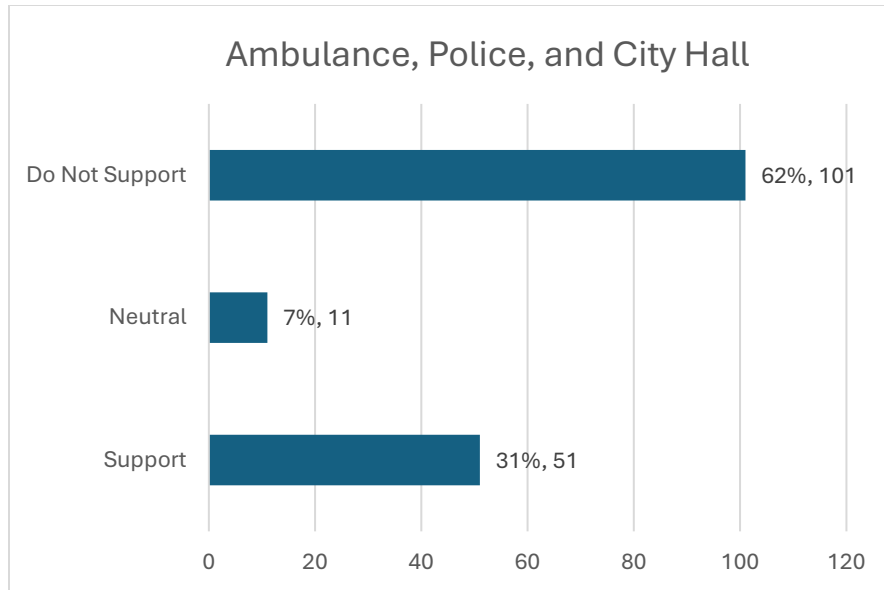
Re: Combined City Facility Survey Results

City of Wabasha staff were directed to conduct an open house and an online survey regarding a potential combined city facility. The survey included options for an Ambulance only facility, Ambulance and City Hall facility, or Ambulance, City Hall, and Police facility. We received 163 survey responses. The results can be found in the graphs below. The graphs show responses for each of the three building options broken out by support, neutral, or does not support. Keeping in mind that people who did not have a strong opinion one way or the other probably did not take the time to fill out the survey. Survey responses were limited to City of Wabasha residents who learned about the survey by seeing it on the City of Wabasha Facebook page, seeing it on the back of their Utility bill, or hearing of it by word of mouth.

Overall, not supporting any options was the majority. Taking out the 58 respondents who were not in favor of any option, a joint building had 49% supporting and 43% supported ambulance only.

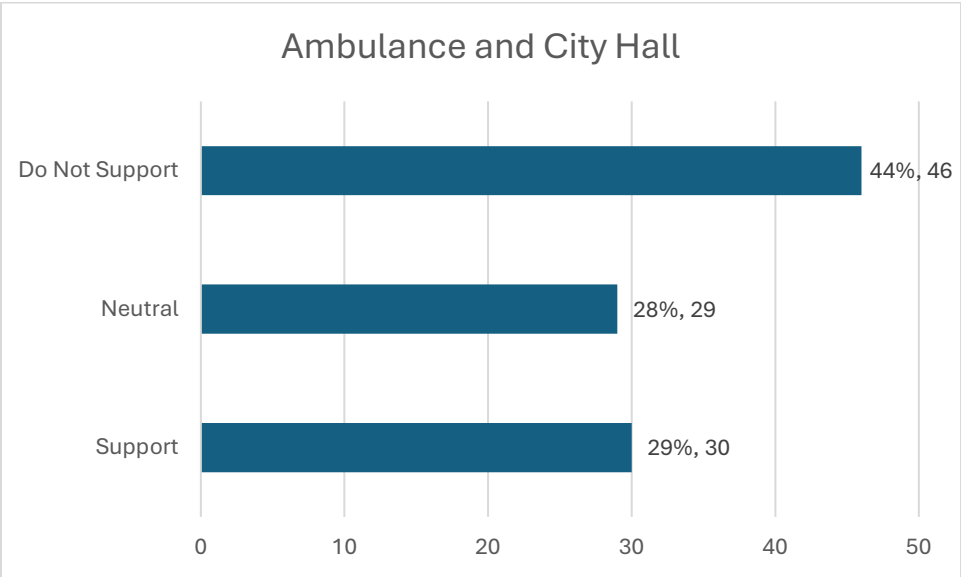
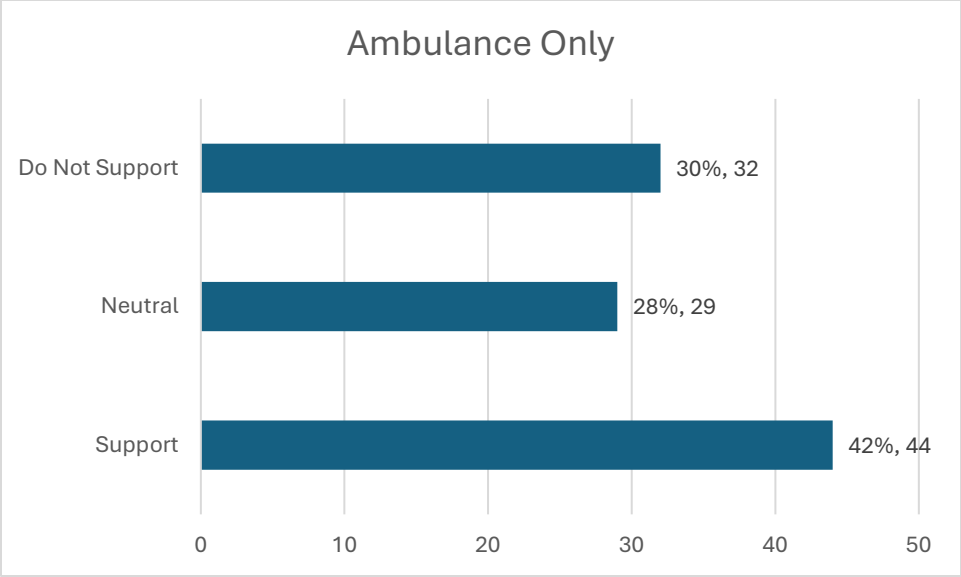
Comments below, staff will also analyze comments ahead of the meeting. Overwhelmingly, people who responded negatively towards any options (58 respondents) were concerned about taxes. Some respondents commented that they were in favor of any option that did not impact property taxes.



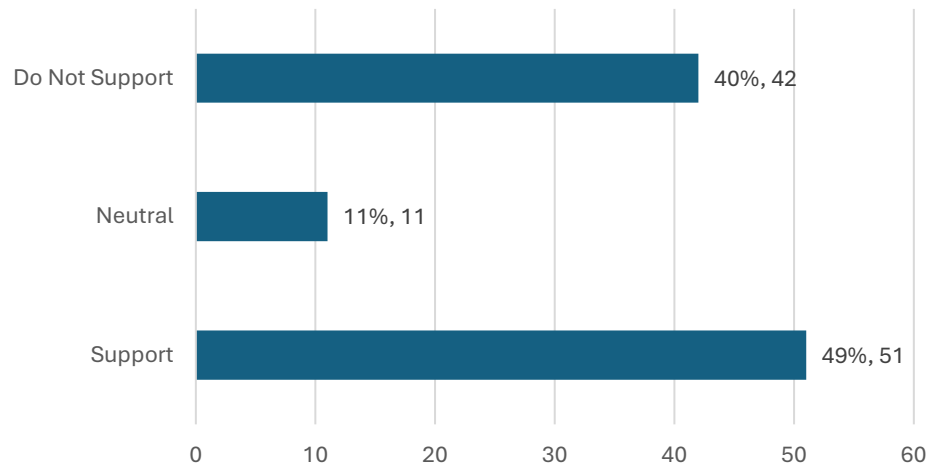


Removing Respondents Who Do Not Support Any Building Project Option

Of the 163 total respondents, 58 do not support any of the three combined city facility options presented in the survey. The graphs below show the survey results of only the 104 respondents who are in favor of at least one of the options. The 58 respondents who do not support any of the three combined building options are not included in the graphs below.



Ambulance, Police, and City Hall



Comments:

On Location for the Future Building

- Get it away from the busy part of town. 4 way stop sign.
- Asap, work for the sheriffs department and I feel ambulance / fire are not interacting enough with us. We have enough space to facilitate them. I do not really think the City Hall should be moved
- Lease space from the county building for city & police requirements.
Build a new ambulance facility. Connect to fire station like other cities have done
This is a small town of less than 3000 residents. Compare to other towns our size not larger cities
- As recently as a couple years ago the county/city was planning on shutting down the new jail. Can this building be modified to hold all, as the building and property are large.
- Collaborate with the hospital on an Ambulance building, the hospital has the space and accommodations for the crew. Plus they need to be a bigger player in the ambulance service.
- Please consider building the structure (ambulance or combined) near the hospital area.

In Favor of Expanding Existing City Hall

Prefer to expand City Hall rather than build a new one

Comments on Ambulance Only

1. Definitely need a new Ambulance facility.
2. Based on the existing conditions, it seems like the ambulance is most in need of full replacement. The police can stay at the county and continue collaborating and sharing space with the sheriff's department. City Hall seems like it could be modified in place.
3. The taxes on Wabasha property is extremely high already. Many people can not afford to own a house here. I totally see the need for a larger ambulance facility but city hall seems adequate for the needs of our community as most business is done online anyway. Our government/ jail has been working for our police needs.
4. The police have a good center at the justice building. The city hall building seems enough to fit our needs.
5. I think the police and sheriff departments are good together
6. Keep the costs down, work within your budget. Ambulance has out grown their facility, city hall has enough room and the police have an excellent arraignment with the county.
7. Only replace building that need to be. City hall is still fine and PD has a good thing going at the cjc
8. A bigger ambulance facility I can understand. But \$2.3 million for a 7500sq ft garage/small living quarters? That is absolutely outrageous and WAY bigger than needed. Maybe city budgeting/planning needs to be looked into. Set a project and year and then save up. Taxes never seem to drop after the Referendum is done.

Suggested Short Term Solutions for Ambulance

1. From Ambulance Commissioner Jane Glander: If a short term solution is needed, can Ambulance Director and Assistant Ambulance Director have their Office Moved to City Hall and do a bedroom at current Location
2. Could Ambulance Storage be moved to addition on Fire Station?

Supportive if does not impact property taxes

1. Would support if paid by grants.
2. Where is the proposed facility/facilities going? Taxpayers are struggling already, need to outsource funding.
3. I support the sales tax Bill Vonwald via phone call
4. Local sales tax to pay for it!!! Property taxes are already too high, we are not all rich!
5. Raising sales tax is a great way to keep residents taxes at a minimum while being inclusive of all who use these services even those who don't live here but shop here and would benefit from such upgrades in an emergent situation.

Renovate Existing Buildings, Build Costs are Too Expensive

1. Given the property tax increases that we just had how do you justify more increases and more spending? I would think going the most frugal route with just a remodel on the ambulance building would make the most sense.
2. Just renovate what you already have like the fire department already did
3. Why do we need to constantly spend money on facilities that don't need to be reconstructed or relocated for no reason. 2 out of the 3 have just had some kind of renovation done.
4. Remodel the ambulance building that's already there! Do not raise my property taxes any more, I'm on a fixed income and can't afford it!
5. The building costs are nuts! I agree some upgrades are needed, they could upgrade the ambulance building like we did the fire station. City taxes are high already, especially with the school not spending their funds wisely. There is so much waste at the city/county and state levels. If you all had to operate like a business, you'd be out of business. There is absolutely no reason to spend that much
6. WHAT HAPPENS TO THE CURRENT "OLD" FACILITIES? STOP WASTING EXISTING FOOTPRINTS - NO NEED TO REPLACE, JUST FIX! USE WHAT YOU ALREADY HAVE. FOCUS ON HOUSING.
7. Current facilities are more than adequate. City of Wabasha Police should continue to be at the Jail, the address infrastructure in Wastewater, Water, and parks. The city is due for an entire Waterwater treatment plant upgrade in the near future which will be a major cost.
8. What is wrong with the massive police building and grounds they currently have?
9. Fix the buildings that you have. Main Street always has to be fixed up. If we are willing to put money into buildings that are 100+ years old then we should be putting money into buildings that are much newer. We need to be more responsible with the taxpayers dollar. City taxes are already out of line. Fix the budget that you have now first. follow the footsteps of the fire department and fix what you have instead of building new. Another tax increase that you were talking on top of the increase that we had last year and the year before is out of line. There are too many people in this town on a fixed income that are already scratching for every cent.

10. Is the city considering raising all of the streets higher than the 65 flood so the services can continue? If not, do not construct a structure in any of the suggested locations. The current city hall was formerly an army reserve center that occupied more personnel than the amount of current employees employed there. modify the existing structure. Taxes are already high in this city along with all the additional so called "fees" that are placed upon residence. This city doesn't have a revenue problem, it has a spending problem.
11. Add on to current city hall and ambulance buildings for more necessary space. Building a new combined complex for city, fire, and ambulance would be great but a financial burden on residents in a small town consisting of many retirees and working poor.

Support City Hall and Ambulance but no police

1. What does the city currently pay to have its offices at the criminal justice center?
The police are better served in the criminal justice center. City hall and the ambulance garage need to be replaced very badly
2. i remember when the new justice center was bultand you put the police out there you said that was the way to go and now you want more when is itgoing to stop

Support addressing City Hall and renovate ambulance

Would if the ambulance goes away in the future? We join with Lake City, or have it privatized by the hospital? The ambulance is expensive to operate and costs money. Maybe in the future we explore it being managed by the County or another entity. When the ambulance's future seems uncertain, does it really make sense to invest heavily in an expensive facility.

In Support of Combined Building All Departments

1. I love the Fire Department, but why not planning on a total city complex.
2. Hope it looks nice for my grandkids.
3. I just feel beter knowin' Police, Ambulance, and City Hall are all in one spot--it kinda helps keep things together and closer to downtown. What is the monthly rent the city received from the eagle center? Hopefully no less that 10k a month. The enrollment at the school has been declining, Until livable wages can be earned in the community we don't need additional housing or expenses. This is a retirement community and they are leaving also because of high taxes.
4. Where would it be built ? I think it's a great idea. Keep up the great work.
5. A combined building should be cheaper than 3 separate facilities.
6. I support the idea of the police department and ambulance sharing a building as they are both 24/7 essential services. City hall should remain a separate building due to the amount of in and out public traffic
7. I do not think City Hall should be integrated with the ambulance. I would support an ambulance and police building as these are both 24/7 services that could benefit from a new building that would function with their needs.
8. It would be a great combined facility. Convenient and efficient use of the property

9. A location that includes ample parking. What would be the future use of existing facilities that would benefit Wabasha?
10. I think the combined municipal building would be advantageous to the community. I appreciate the option 1 and think it would be a great use of the space. I also agree that Wabasha could benefit from development both structurally and economically.
11. Until the Ambulance service realigns their priorities and remove the toxic bullies they do not deserve stand alone facilities. Accountability, by having city staff to oversee ambulance staff will be very helpful. Adding PD is even better idea.
12. Thank you for your continued effort to ensure Wabasha has adequate facilities now and in the future.

Combined Building Too Expensive or Against Concept of City Hall with First Responders

1. Ambulance, Police, and City Hall would be nice, but too expensive.
2. Not sure the city should spend money on a new City hall or combining all facilities, although it would be nice
3. Law enforcement costs seem to high al ready. Do we really need traps setup all the time. Let's get back to "Serve and protect".
4. Will in the future the fire department move into the new facility? I do believe city hall should be separate from first responders.

No to all options due to property taxes

1. Not at this time. The tax implications, of top of what we already pay are just too costly! One of the Ambulance personnel said they need more space primarily for mental health. If someone is struggling after a call, use a call support center. There currently is space to be alone if needed. The current facility could be easily modified to address any necessary improvements.
2. Anything that's going to raise my taxes is a hard no from me
3. retired , fixed income , city tax going up faster than income
4. You are going to tax us seniors right out of the city.
5. Our taxes are already high enough!!
6. Our taxes have increased dramatically in recent years. We need to hold back on unnecessary expenditures. We are approving expenditures that are partially supported by grants, but the balance is still paid by increased taxes. We need to be prudent when trying to justify tax increases.
7. Taxes are out of control already in Wabasha
8. First of all you have not budgeted one nickel for this project. the people of this community have been hit with skyrocketing property taxes, plus school referendum. you have to look at what you need and what you want. a big wish list is fine but is it practical, no! your focus should be on creating a bigger tax base not spending as much money as possible. when the police department was moved out of the city hall to the county building it was stated that this would be more efficient, guess not. maybe the ambulance service needs to be subbed out. there is room around the existing city hall building to expand. have these options been addressed. local

government has done a poor job of maintaining their buildings and properties. the school abandoning buildings that are still in full use, the county building a criminal justice center that was mostly unnecessary and now city buildings that are not that old and we're being told they are not good enough any more. instead of looking at all the downfalls of what we have maybe think we should look at the good things we have.

9. The county should really be mindful of all the tax increases each year, this is a small town with few job opportunities and people will not be able to afford the cost of living here if expenses are constantly going up
10. Taxes are already too high for this town. Even a couple hundred dollars extra a year is too much. I would never have built in this town if every year my taxes go up by a couple hundred dollars and our income doesn't go up as fast.
11. The current buildings and facilities are perfectly fine and usable. The city of Wabasha has a severe spending problem. Property taxes are out of control for seniors to stay here anymore. Find alternate funding sources
12. Our taxes have doubled in the last 5 years since living here. All of those departments currently have facilities that are more than good enough to continue to use. The taxes and housing issues are already making it hard for young families to want to move here and making families here think about leaving- why would we increase the taxes on people here again?
13. There is already a lack of trust in the community with our officials misusing money. Please do not do this.
14. Taxes have already increased significantly, people are already struggling to survive in the community. You've recently redone things in all buildings. Top of the line isn't always necessary
15. People are being taxed out of their homes. We need to stop the spending.
16. If this was a need it should have been prioritized over a million dollar sports complex that was a want. This better be a tax increase that is voted on, not decided on by a handful of people.
17. I just feel safer knowin' the police, ambulance, and City Hall are all in the same place, makes it feel more like it's part of downtown.
18. Why did we polish a turd for a firehall. We should have made a public safety facility and been done.
19. Stop wasting the Tax payers money. Isn't the new update on the school enough for a few years....
20. The tax increase would be devastating to many home owners.
21. I think this would be a hardship that isn't needed on the taxpayers of the community
22. Property taxes are too high
Already. Where is the money coming from?
23. We just remodeled the fire station. Where is all the money from recent tax increases going? Also, you refinanced debt AFTER rates went up in a terrible show of financial acumen.
24. It just seems like there's about zero fiscal knowledge/responsibility. You're making it nearly impossible for young families to move to town. Come up with a damn growth plan and stop pushing for more spending at all times until you have one.

25. We cannot afford this project.
26. Deferred maintenance, cities poor planning. New siding on fire station, poor planing. How about reducing budget, streamline departments, sell of never used parks like the frisbee golf. You cannot raise taxes every year to support uncontrolled spending!
27. I would support it but the property tax is already unbearable. Between the school and road projects if this goes through we'll be on the verge of being taxed out of town. Start charging the air BnBs a proper municipality fee because the average local can't afford to live here.
28. The city needs to slow down on there dream spending its out of control.
Real estate taxes are raising to fast between city and school.
Time for a slowdown
29. We are already over taxed!! And can't afford anymore so we need to live with what we have!!!
30. The city taxes are already high with hidden fees on utility bills. i.e street light fee, franchise fees. The city can't maintain what they already have. We need employers that pay fair wages before building housing that will eventually turn into section 6 housing. The city shouldn't be building a port on behalf of USACE. We don't need additional parks. Enough money has been spent on behalf of the eagle center with no return to the city residents. What is the monthly rent the city receives from the eagle center? hopefully no less than 10k a month. The enrollment at the school has been declining, until livable wages can be earned in the community we don't need additional housing or expenses. This is a retirement community and they are leaving also because of the high taxes.
31. I moved back to Wabasha 6 years ago. Since then, property taxes have almos tdouabled. This has to slow down. I have been told by a county worker, well your place is worth more. And even if I sell it I wouldn't be able to afford anything else to buy in this town.
32. I have lived in the City for 35 years. The city of Wabasha has not grown over that period of time. Why did the facility study determine we need a combined facility? A city that is not growing can not afford a new location. I will lobby the citizens of Wabasha MN to vote NO to a new location. The citizen of sykline drive have been trying to get their road fixed for six years
33. With the recent school levy, most citizens can not afford more taxes. City Hall is just fine and the only reason you want to replace it is so you can tear it down and put more parking in. We are already taxed to death, the city needs to stop spending.
34. Taxes are too high right now in the city. This project will exacerbate this issue further.
35. Property taxes have quadrupled since we moved here in the mid nineties. Where does it stop? Population has basically been stagnant and services keep adding and adding. It has become unaffordable.

City needs to do more or present more research

1. I would like to see the yearly cost to operate today and projected future cost, having multiple buildings compared to one bldg. Where are the police currently setup? No info on their need for space. Also no info on the cost of acquiring location C.
2. Keep studying the project to get full info.

3. Consider County and School District needs as well.
4. Was wondering what the existing ambulance building will be used for when a new one would be built. Need to figure out a less costly grading cost.
5. This should have been a consideration back when the new building on old 61 was built
6. Consider developing a year round indoor pool and recreation center for the aging population
7. While I appreciate the information provided I feel residents need more information to evaluate this proposal. What will happen to these standing properties? Does the cities growth or decrease in population warrant changes and is this tax increase viable long term. This may be The last line... if not approved and quoted numbers lacks transparency. I want to support new or changing dynamics within the city yet I question these changes based on Wabasha downtown dying businesses, the population or lack of in ages 18 years and younger, and the aging population. How do we support these interests? Along with increased taxes if unapproved projects are not approved? We can not be sustainable while our tourism and birthrate decreases and then taxing out residents. Our country is at a stand still with unstable tariffs. Building these buildings could be under estimated in cost and labor. Government spending needs more transparency and this survey does not touch any of my concerns. I will be attending future planning council meetings.
8. Where would the facilities be built?
9. Research and present use of existing buildings

Other

1. why did we ever move the police to the court house, the only one in favor were the chief and the county. It was a ideal to off set the large cost of the justice center. it was always know as being sort term solution. Way would the fire dept. spent all that money on the building caused by the over purchase of equipment. Do you think you could move to the swamp behind the present barn. Maybe you should talk to the EPA about that and the old dump also.
2. Also all of these schematics show buildings being put in the flood plain, including additional apartments. If residents aren't allowed to build or modify in a flood plain how can the plan be to build several buildings on it, just because now the city wants to? The flood plain issue and why this is now ok for the city to do, needs to be clarified. I would be much more in favor of paying for full time fire fighter staff. They are called to go out so frequently and have to cover more territory due to the river than an average small town fire fighting operation not next to a river. Is there metrics on call volumes and territory that would point to needing a full time staff using other similarly sized cities as comparison? Living next to them it feels like they are called out very frequently.