PUBLIC SAFETY REFERENDUM

A closer look at the $65 million investment facing Owatonna voters

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A city divided: How did we get here?

BY KAY FATE
STAFF WRITER

A deeply divided electorate will head to the polls next week to decide the fate of a multi-million-dollar public safety bond in Owatonna.

The vote will cap a community debate of need vs. want, pitting residents angry about a lack of transparency and the project's tax burden against community members who argue first responders desperately need modernized facilities and equipment to ensure public safety.

The city is asking to issue up to $65 million in general obligation bonds in order to fund the project.

Residents who support the new police and fire stations say it's time for the city to stop kicking the can down the road when it comes to the aging buildings – the cost will only climb if the project is delayed.

City officials, including the new police and fire chiefs, have said the existing buildings are outdated and inefficient; lack privacy for confidential and business matters, as well as limited space for growing equipment and training; and need updates to mechanical, electrical, plumbing and technology.

The current fire hall was built in 1906; it lacks a dedicated decontamination area and adequate vehicle storage, requiring some fire vehicles to be housed at multiple locations across the city.

The police department operates out of a 60-year-old former bank building. The issues include a lack of secure areas, and does not allow for safe separation between the public, officers and suspects.

Fire hall

The existing fire hall, at 120 years old, is showing its age despite significant renovations in 1996 and 2008. At 27,000 square feet, it falls about 13,000 square feet short of what is ideal, according to Chris Zimmer of ICS Consulting, and is landlocked.

The building has many leaks, and needs new windows, upgrades to HVAC, electric and technology, and tuck-pointing of the exterior.

Security is limited, Zimmer said, as is parking. The training facilities housed in the basement are "lacking," and the current living quarters have up to three firefighters sharing a space – including a communal toilet and shower.

All told, he said, the facility's infrastructure needs $1.4 million worth of work.

There is no dedicated cool-down/mental health area, "which is becoming a more important need in our society," Zimmer said.

Law Enforcement Center

Much of the same issues apply to the current LEC, including needing additional space – about 18,000 more square feet, Zimmer said.

The roof and windows are due for replacement; HVAC and elevator upgrades are required; the masonry requires tuck-pointing and the sewage ejector within the facility has problems with its seal and proper exhaust.

The 1950-built former bank was retrofitted to its current use in 1997, with "small renovations" since.

There are no holding cells, no family/victim interview rooms, no secure vehicle sally port and inadequate separation of private law enforcement spaces from the public.

There is no proper training space; the armory – which involves guns and ammunition, evidence processing, storage and public parking areas are all inadequate, Zimmer said.

The price tag to address the infrastructure would be $2.2 million.

Building new

The problems at the existing facilities would be resolved with new facilities, Zimmer said, including issues with their current locations.

The fire hall would move to the current site of the LEC; a new LEC would be built on the former Cemstone site. The city already owns both properties.

Moving the fire hall out of a busy downtown intersection would centralize it, maximizing response times, Zimmer said.

The city also owns adjoining property, allowing the fire hall to house all its equipment on site; many pieces are stored around town now, he said.

The new LEC would

See **DIVIDED** on 3 ►

Police Department		
Option	Estimated Cost	Comparison
New Police Department	$35.5 million	Modern facility designed for long-term needs
Remodel & Addition to Existing LEC	$29 million	~82% of the cost of building new
Fire Station		
Option	Estimated Cost	Comparison
New Fire Station	$26 million	Modern facility designed for current and future operations
Remodel Existing Fire Station	$19.5 million	~75% of the cost of building new
Joint Facility Option		
	Estimated Cost	Comparison
New Joint Police & Fire Facility	$61.5 million	Purpose-built facility with modern operational design
Remodel & Addition to Existing LEC	$52.5 million	~97% of the cost of building new

Note: *Costs shown are project-level estimates and do not include additional land acquisition costs when applicable.*

The $65 million estimate covers:

Construction of both facilities	Site preparation and infrastructure	Equipment, technology and safety features	Design, engineering and other project costs

After studying a range of options, the City determined anything less than $56 million would sacrifice essential features.

Vote Yes Campaign

Volunteers look toward the future

BY KAY FATE
STAFF WRITER

Tyler Cochran has been the face behind the push to support building new public safety facilities in Owatonna.

The group he helps lead, called Protect Owatonna – Vote Yes, has been very active on social media, as well as in the community.

The members describe themselves as "a group of community volunteers who are doing this work because it is something we believe in and are passionate about."

The group believes a yes vote is, among other things, a vote for community standards; a vote for recruitment and retention; and a vote for long-term planning.

They have faced multiple negative comments on their social media posts, but say they have "just as many conversations with people who are in favor of the projects."

Cochran said he learned about the city's plans for the public safety facilities several years ago.

As co-chair of the Community Center Community Task Force, "I paid close attention to the city's public communication about the concurrent work they were doing internally to determine the best path forward for public safety facilities," he said.

Cochran also reviewed the plans at the February 2026 open houses and attended frequent Owatonna City Council study sessions.

He said the community has been kept informed of the city's process "and has had opportunities to provide feedback."

He said his first reaction to the proposal was that "now is the time for our community to make a lasting investment in public safety," calling previous solutions "temporary band-aids."

Cochran believes both facilities are "fundamentally inadequate, both requiring varying amounts of deferred maintenance if they are to be kept operational." The outdated facilities, he said, "will require continual investment and cannot fully meet the needs of modern public safety operations."

Tyler Cochran

He agreed with the consultant's assessment of inadequate training, storage and public spaces; decontamination areas; and the lack of "dignified space for victims, secure holding area for suspects, room for investigations and more."

The needs don't go away and the costs to meet the needs will not go down, Cochran cautioned.

"I am involved because I want our community to thrive, and public safety is foundational to that goal," he said. "Many in our community, myself included, want to see new public amenities like a community center. Projects like that can't happen until these core public safety needs are addressed."

Cochran said he recognizes that police and fire work are "technical, complex, and ever-evolving. These facilities must be planned and designed by those who use them and by other experts in these fields."

He was surprised by the community response, including the push for the reverse referendum; the surprise is that "more people haven't chosen to be involved or informed until this late in the process," Cochran said.

His hope for Nov. 4, he said, "is that the referendum will pass, and the facility needs will be met."

A city divided: How did we get here?

◄ **DIVIDED** from **2**

include indoor parking, proper privacy, mental health rooms and even a space for canine care when the K9 officer is in the building.

The initial proposed location for a new police station also drew fire: It was originally designed to be built at Owatonna's West Hills campus, which is city-owned, but on the National Register of Historic Places.

After months of protest about the location, the city council last month changed the plan, moving it about six blocks away.

The designs

The conceptual floor plans of the proposed fire station total about 42,300 square feet, with five bays, dedicated gear storage away from vehicle exhaust and dedicated ventilation rooms, as well as the other updates requested.

Because of the recent location change for the proposed police station, building design, floor plans and renderings have not been developed for the new site. The original proposal called for a 60,000-square-foot facility.

Pushback

Residents have questioned the transparency of the process; City Administrator Jenna Tuma disputed that at the March 3 meeting, when the city voted unanimously to provide preliminary approval to issue the bonds.

"In 2022, we really started talking about our facility needs," she said. "We created a website page; we've been to, I think, 18 city council meetings or study sessions," in addition to news releases and newsletters that are sent to residents.

City officials say nothing has been hidden, claiming the project has been in their sights since 2019 – though their own records refute that.

During the public hearing that preceded the March 3 vote, 17 residents provided input; all but three were against the project as presented.

Nearly all of them, however, emphasized that their opinions were not a condemnation of the work those first responders do – nor of the need for more modern facilities.

The issue, they say, is the cost.

The approval of the bond issuance prompted an immediate response from those opposed to the project.

Minnesota state law provides for reverse referendums, allowing citizens to petition against action taken by local government and forcing a public vote to approve or reject the action. One of the main requirements is signatures representing five percent of the votes cast in the last general election.

In Owatonna, that amounted to 721 signatures; organizers collected more than 2,500.

Residents will vote on the issue Nov. 3.

Owatonna Public Safety Referendum Timeline:

December 2019: ICS provides the city with a proposal for facilities assessment process. No specific mention of public safety facilities.

March-July 2020: The city held strictly virtual meetings because of COVID.

April-June 2020: ICS performs facilities assessment of all city facilities. No specific mention of public safety facilities.

July 2020: ICS presents assessment to city council, detailing deferred and upcoming maintenance needs. No specific mention of public safety facilities.

September 2021: City plans to form facilities task force.

October 2021: City council members tour existing facilities, review ICS facilities assessment.

April 2022: City re-engages ICS. A facilities task force was created, comprised of city staff and elected officials to "explore and make recommendations" about existing facilities. No specific mention of public safety facilities.

June 2022: City updates budgetary numbers; per the city's information, this is the first mention of a budget for facilities projects.

July 2022: Facilities task force findings presented at a city council study session. No specific mention of public safety facilities.

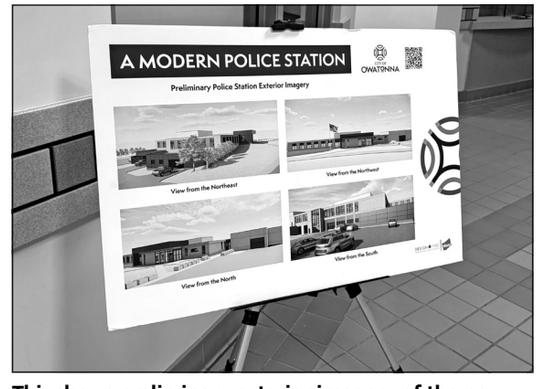
October 2023: City determines assets worth investing in and prioritizing. No specific mention of public safety facilities. Merrill Hall renovation project is approved for $5.3 million.

April 2024: The city purchases the county's portion of the Law Enforcement Center for $700,000. The sheriff's offices will relocate to the Steele County Detention Center.

May 2024: Project scope development and communications for public safety center and community center is discussed at city council meeting. Tuma told the members "the city is considering building a community center and updating the public safety buildings. The recent completion of the City's Facility Assessment and Facility Plan has shown the need for upgrades to the public safety facilities and a desire for a community center." She estimated the scope and development, done by ICS, would be about $285,000.

June 2024: Public safety task force is created and tours existing facilities.

July-August 2024: Public safety task force visits other new fire and police facilities.



This shows preliminary exterior imagery of the new police station proposed to be built at the former Cemstone site on North Street next to Cash Wise Foods.

July-August 2024: Public safety task force works with city financial advisor to define financing and tax impact.

November 2024: City council members approve the final scope of project, as well as the budget and financing schedule.

December 2024: City hires lobbyist LGN for a one-year contract for $40,000.

January 2025: The city completes an evaluation of six project site options, the overall project scope and proposed building designs. A facilities steering committee recommends a new fire hall be built at the existing law enforcement center and a new police station be built at the West Hills campus.

February 2025: City pays $114,000 to Legence Subsidiary Holdings LLC (dba ICS) for "professional service fee – Public Safety Center"

March 2025: City pays $238,000 to Legence Subsidiary Holdings LLC for "professional service fee – Public Safety Center"

May 2025: City pays $14,065 to Legence Subsidiary Holdings LLC for "professional service fee – Public Safety Center"

June 2025: City council passes Resolution 32-25, approving reimbursement of expenditures from future bond proceeds. Former Finance Director Emily Burns told the council, "although the Public Safety Center Project is still in the proposed stage, some resources are already being allocated for the scope and design work. If the project progresses, these expenses will be eligible for reimbursement."

June 2025: Minnesota Rep. Tom Sexton announces at an Owatonna City Council meeting that no funding was allocated for public safety centers.

August 2025: City Administrator Kris Busse retires; Jenna Tuma assumes the role.

September 2025: The city pays $260,000 for the former Owatonna Public Schools' district office on Bridge Street to "serve as a temporary home for the police department during the construction of new police and fire facilities."

September 2025: A city news release says "progress is underway to design the new police and fire facilities, with construction expected to begin in late summer 2026 and completion anticipated in fall 2027. The total estimated cost for both facilities is $61 million."

September 2025: City pays Legence Subsidiary Holdings LLC (dba ICS) "$224,739 for "public safety center;" $4,204 for "community center."

This is a rendering of the proposed new fire station and site design that would be built on the existing Law Enforcement site on Pearl Street.

Oct. 7, 2025: City pays Legence Subsidiary Holdings LLC $238,554 for "public safety center;" $4,145 for "community center."

Oct. 21, 2025: City pays Legence Subsidiary Holdings LLC $56,065 for "public safety center;" $4,384 for "community center."

Nov. 18, 2025: ICS presents "Public Safety Center Facilities Update" at a city council study session. This appears to be the first formal presentation about any sort of proposal for new public safety center facilities.

Nov. 18, 2025: City pays Legence Subsidiary Holdings LLC $185,858 for "public safety center;" $4,345.37 for "community center."

December 2025: City pays Legence Subsidiary Holdings LLC $133,135 for "public safety center" and $4,145 for "community center."

Jan. 6, 2026: City Administrator Tuma requested approval of an amended ICS agreement for professional services, which includes the design of two proposed facilities, one as a police facility and another as a fire facility, as well as the bidding process and construction oversight for both projects. Total fees, she said, would be $8,417,240.

Feb. 3, 2026: City hosts public open house to share building plans, cost estimates and gather community feedback, but not input.

Feb. 26, 2026: City hosts another public open house to share building plans, cost estimates and gather community feedback, but not input.

Feb. 4, 2026: City council approves Resolution 20-26 to set a public hearing to related to the adoption of a capital improvement plan and the issuance of general obligation bonds for the police and fire facilities, not to exceed $65 million.

February 2026: City pays Legence Subsidiary Holdings LLC $156,432 for "December Professional Services."

March 3, 2026: City council approves intent to issue general obligation bonds for the public safety facilities.

March 3, 2026: City pays Legence Subsidiary Holdings LLC $314,750 (no description given).

April 2, 2026: Owatonna residents file a petition, known as a reverse referendum, to force the issuance of bonds be put to a public vote, stopping the project process temporarily.

April 7, 2026: City pays Legence Subsidiary Holdings LLC $334,435 for "public safety center."

May 5, 2026: City pays Legence Subsidiary Holdings LLC $386,369 for "public safety center."

May 19, 2026: City pays Legence Subsidiary Holdings LLC $377,019 for "public safety center."

Aug. 5, 2026: City pays Legence Subsidiary Holdings LLC $233,131 for "public safety center."

Aug. 19, 2026: City pays Legence Subsidiary Holdings LLC $22,145 for "public safety center."

Sept. 15, 2026: The city changes the proposed site of the new police station from the West Hills campus to the former Cemstone site on North Street.

Sept. 15, 2026: City pays Legence Subsidiary Holdings LLC $176,506 for "public safety center."

Sept. 30, 2026: City pays Legence Subsidiary Holdings LLC $18,279 for "public safety center."

Oct. 7, 2026: City pays Legence Subsidiary Holdings LLC $162,261 for "public safety center."

Nov. 3, 2026: Election Day. The public safety facilities are on the ballot.

All information was gathered from Owatonna City Council agendas, minutes and financial reports.

City provides public safety response from leaders

BY KAY FATE
STAFF WRITER

A project as sweeping as new public safety facilities – including a police department that must make two moves – has several moving parts, and several departments weighing in.

Though the *Steele County Times* asked city leaders individually for their thoughts on the public safety proposal and its process, the city's communication specialist provided answers in one email, saying they "represent the responses from Mayor Matt Jessop, Police Chief Josh Sorensen, Fire Chief Steve Baker and Assistant Fire Chief Jacob Dashiell."

The *Times'* first question to each of the individuals was about when they first learned of the public safety plan as presented to Owatonna City Council in March 2026.

The city's answer:

A process to assess the needs of all city-owned facilities began in December 2019, when the city initiated a review of all its existing structures. An updated facilities assessment started in March 2020, with the findings presented during an open city council meeting in July 2020. Internal reviews of both police and fire facilities continued throughout 2021.

Additional assessments and refinement of facility needs occurred through early 2024, culminating in an updated presentation of those needs as recommended by the Facilities Steering Committee at a council work session in March 2024.

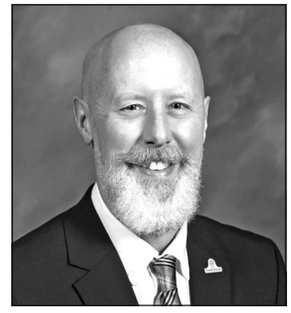
The city established a Public Safety Task Force in spring 2024, consisting of previous chiefs of both police and fire departments; now-Police Chief Josh Sorensen; Fire Commander Arik Brase; city administration, community development, engineering staff, and the interim finance director; ICS consultants; City Councilors Dave Burbank, Doug Voss, Kevin Raney and Nathan Dotson (only three on at a time); and user groups with the police and fire departments consisting of specific departments or teams – investigations, patrol officers, administrative personnel, on-call and full-time firefighters – to provide input related to use of space needs and functions of day-to-day activities within each department.

As new leadership came on board, such as Assistant Fire Chief Jacob Dashiell and Facilities & Fleet Director Patrick McDermott, they were immediately brought up to speed and included in project meetings, the city's email said.

From June through October 2024, the task force toured multiple police and fire facilities – both new builds and remodels – in other communities, evaluated a range of scenarios to address current and future needs, and worked closely with the City's financial advisor to understand financing options and tax impacts.

In November 2024, the proposed scope of the project was reviewed during a city council work session. The projects – their scope, budget and schedule – was formally approved in December 2024 during an open meeting.

Throughout this entire multi-year process, leadership and staff from both the police and fire departments were informed, involved and represented in the planning and evaluation of facility needs.



Matt Jessop

Steve Baker

Josh Sorensen

The city council sets budget limitations.

Which specific safety or operational failures cannot be fixed through a targeted remodel of the existing footprint?

The city is using buildings that were either not designed for public safety services or do not meet the needs of modern public safety operations. No amount of maintenance will resolve the issues of poor layout and limitations due to being landlocked. Several critical safety and operational failures simply cannot be corrected within the existing footprint.

For the fire department, the current station cannot accommodate modern apparatus or safety standards with an undersized apparatus bay that results in gear being stored in the same space as vehicles, exposing protective equipment to exhaust and increasing contamination risks. Inadequate ventilation allows exhaust to permeate the rest of the building. This is an issue that cannot be solved without expanding the building's footprint.

Additionally, the station lacks adequate space to create properly designed decontamination areas or modern training rooms, both of which are essential to firefighter safety but impossible to retrofit due to the structural and spatial constraints of the aging facility.

For the police department, the lack of a secure sallyport is a major operational and safety failure that cannot be remedied within the current site. The existing garage is used simultaneously for evidence storage and in-custody transfers, creating unavoidable safety risks for officers, detainees and staff.

The building is also too close to the street to provide required safety hardening measures, such as adequate setbacks and secure glazing. These deficiencies cannot be solved through renovation because the property itself does not provide the necessary space or configuration.

These examples illustrate that the core challenges are not cosmetic or maintenance related. They stem from buildings that fundamentally cannot support today's public safety operations.

Mayor Matt Jessop was asked when consulting firm ICS first presented its plans and designs to the city council.

The reply from the city said "rather than a single 'first presentation,' ICS provided updates at multiple points during study sessions and open meetings, including the March 2024 work session and the November-December 2024 discussions where the scope, budget and schedule were finalized.

"Their work was integrated into the broader multi-year assessment process and shared publicly as part of those open meetings and work sessions."

Each city leaders was also asked about planning and transparency:

Do you believe the planning process has been handled as well as it could have been? If not, what could have been done better/differently?

Throughout this entire process the city has been deeply committed to transparency and ensuring that any plan that was developed would have our community's best interest in mind, the city email said.

Projects of this scale inevitably generate a wide range of perspectives. The City, along with the Facilities Steering Committee and Public Safety Task Force, invested several years in reviewing facility conditions, gathering input from police and fire leadership and staff, engaging subject-matter experts, and evaluating multiple scenarios to ensure the planning process was thorough and transparent. From that standpoint, the process was handled responsibly and with a strong commitment to due diligence.

The city has consistently taken this project out into the community – not just to city council meetings. The city has conducted community surveys, hosted Council Connect events dedicated to this project, held two open houses in February 2026, staffed a booth at the Steele County Fee Fair and every Downtown Thursday event, and offered public tours of the current police and fire facilities.

Each of these efforts was designed to meet residents where they are and actively invite questions, feedback and input on the future of the public safety facilities.

This multi-year effort reflects a collaborative approach that included staff, leadership, committees and task forces, elected officials, and subject-matter experts working together to evaluate needs and explore alternatives that fit Owatonna's public safety needs.

Are you surprised by the response – including the push for the reverse referendum – of the public?

No. People have different opinions on City investment and services. It is a natural part of a democracy to want the opportunity to have a say on how tax dollars are spent. We welcome that and hope people exercise their right to vote on or before Election Day.

What do you think would be the best possible outcome for the community, all things considered?

That we address these needs with the public safety facilities and improve our police and fire services to protect our community and be there when they need us most for decades to come.

Opponents target cost, lack of input on project

Former firefighter: Deferred maintenance was purposely planned

BY KAY FATE
STAFF WRITER

Kate Coleman first learned of the proposed public safety plan at the Owatonna City Council's work session on Nov. 18, 2025.

"My partner and I were attending due to the 13.9% (proposed) budget increase," she said. "The first public comment I made (about the plan) was on Dec. 16, when I referenced the West Hills campus being on the National Register of Historic Places."

Though the location of the proposed police station has since been moved to another city-owned property, it set the tone for the discussion.

Coleman is now a regular attendee of city council meetings, along with several other residents who oppose the project, including Carl Wieman, whose property abuts the West Hills campus. He also learned of the public safety plan at the Nov. 18 meeting.

Melissa Zimmerman said she became aware of the project in early 2025, when the city hired a lobbyist to seek state funding; she said when she asked council members after the meeting what would happen if funding were not secured, "I was told the project would not move forward."

In June, Minnesota Rep. Tom Sexton, R-Waseca, announced at the Owatonna City Council meeting that no state funding had been allocated for public safety centers; Zimmerman said "based on what I had previously been told," the project would not proceed.

Three months later, however, the city "quietly approved the purchase of a former school building," she said, and identified the property as a temporary home for the police department.

Zimmerman claims residents were told comments about the project were not welcome during the December 2025 Truth in Taxation meeting "because it was not included in that year's levy."

In February, when she attended the city's first public open house about the project, Zimmerman said City Administrator Jenna Tuma told her, "This is a done deal; we are not looking for any input." Zimmerman said she then asked where residents could submit comments about the facilities; Tuma's answer was that the city "is not seeking any comments from the public."

The three have toured both existing facilities and agree that updates need to be made, "but what I saw on the (police station) tour could be remodeled … without spending the millions that is projected," Wieman said.

Coleman and Zimmerman agree that the police station needs a new roof and the layout could be improved, but said much of the space appeared underutilized.

"Initially, the concern was a lack of space," Coleman said, "but by the end of the tour, the question became, 'If we don't move, where will the fire department go?'"

"I'm not saying we shouldn't do anything," Zimmerman said. "But I do believe maintenance, updates, better organization and reconfiguration could go a long way in both buildings."

Ryan Seykora has spent several years as a firefighter, 12 of them in Owatonna. He is now a captain at the Shakopee Fire Department.

He claims the deferred maintenance at OFD was "purposely planned. Now they're going around doing this dog and pony show, saying they need these diesel exhaust systems because of the contaminants that get on turnout gear every time they start up a truck."

Seykora said there are filters installed on all the trucks to eliminate that potential, "and all these trucks run on diesel exhaust fluid, which is to help reduce the contaminants … diesel trucks have never been cleaner."

That's something that "hasn't been accurately portrayed to the community."

He said the city "had a decon room all planned out, laid out, everything like that, then they eliminated it, so they were already putting this in motion. They were putting trucks in the apparatus bay to show that they're running out of room – they're doing all these things, but it was never truthful."

A review of the city's capital improvement plans from 2019-2023 indicates an annual $80,000 request for a decontamination area for OFD. It would remodel the back garage of the existing fire station to create a decontamination station, to include pressure washers, washing stations, bathrooms, showers and a locker room.

In 2024, the decontamination area was no longer a part of the CIP.

An annual request for tuckpointing of the building was also gone by 2024.

Coleman, Wieman and Zimmerman say they are worried that climbing taxes will negatively affect the city's plan to grow its population to 30,000 by 2030, but said there is a much larger issue at play: a lack of transparency throughout the planning.

"We need open and transparent government, and I don't believe we have that at any level right now," Zimmerman said. "People want to participate. They want their concerns addressed, not dismissed. They want consistent factual information that is easy to access and understand."

"The police station was first discussed by the council in 2019," Wieman said, "but the city did not tell the public."

In fact, the first mention of a new public safety facility in the city's capital improvement plan was in 2019, with a $2.3 million request for a police station in 2022. It was there again in 2020, with the request pushed out to 2023.

The 2024 CIP included a project to remodel public safety facility in 2025, with a total cost of $6.34 million.

Less than a year later, the city hired a lobbyist.

The three people leading the Vote No campaign are now comfortable inspecting government documents and researching statutes, which led them to facilitate the reverse referendum after the council members preliminarily approved issuing bonds for the $65 million project.

The public response was nothing short of amazing, Coleman said, with triple the number of signatures needed to force a vote.

Public input, she said, means sitting down together and having meaningful conversations.

"The reverse referendum did more than pause the project," Zimmerman said. "It changed the entire trajectory of our local government. It stopped the (project's) process, sparked conversations and forced the city … to respond to public concerns in ways they hadn't before.

"We're not asking to design the buildings or choose paint colors," Zimmerman said, "but all of us probably could have told you" that the cost and the West Hills location would be problematic before money was spent designing a building there.

Kate Coleman

"Most importantly," she said, the reverse referendum "showed residents that their voices can make a difference."

None of them believe the ballot measure will pass Nov. 3; Wieman thinks it's a matter of over-building.

Coleman said she hopes the past several months have brought more of an appreciation for historic and cultural preservation, something that matters to her.

"We all agree that our first responders are appreciated, vital and deserving of our support," Zimmerman said. "The best possible outcome would be for Owatonna to come together, restore public trust and find realistic solutions that meet the needs of our first responders without placing an unreasonable financial burden on our community."

Come Nov. 4, she said, "if this referendum fails, the question shouldn't be, 'how much money?' It should be, 'how much public input?'

"The best outcome isn't just better facilities," Zimmerman said. "It's a stronger community where residents have a meaningful voice in the decisions that shape our future."

PAID ADVERTISEMENT BY RESIDENTS OF OWATONNA

VOTE NO

POLICE & FIRE

$65 MILLION REFERENDUM

A VOICE

Major decisions should include meaningful public input.

AFFORDABILITY

This project is too expensive for our community right now.

LESS PROPERTY TAX INCREASES

A "Yes" vote is a vote for a property tax increase.

★ ★ ★ NOVEMBER 3 ★ ★ ★