

Stephen F. Owen
City Manager

Birthplace of the
Council-Manager
Form of Government



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November 3, 2015

Patrick J. Coffield
County Administrator
Augusta County Government Center
P.O. Box 590
Verona, VA 24482

Dear Pat,

Thank you for your email responses to our letter dated October 23, 2015.

We send this letter starting with one basic assumption: the City's judicial facilities are generally in good condition and will serve the City's needs for the foreseeable future, while the County's facilities, as recognized by the circuit court judge, are not and will not. This is not intended to score points or cast blame; we simply recognize the present condition of the facilities. It informs the City's consistent position. There is no need for a City project, unless the County unilaterally terminates the currently semi-consolidated (or joint) juvenile and domestic relations district court arrangement in the course of relocating its courts to Verona.

In contrast, the County will need to do something. As we have said all along, we hope you will do that something in the City—whether on your own or together with the City as a part of a consolidation of our respective courts. We continue to believe there are benefits to both localities that will result from the County's maintenance of its Courts in the City. There is no need to repeat here all of those benefits. But, we recognize you may see things differently.

You have identified several issues that, as you have presented them, appear to be an impediment to County participation in a consolidated courts project in downtown Staunton. City Council wants to be clear that they are more than willing to work on these other issues with you, by whatever means possible—including mediation—in an effort to reach common ground; and we believe common ground can be reached.

At the last meeting of the Augusta County Board of Supervisors, we understand there was some discussion about the resumption of negotiations between the County and the City. We can do that – just let us know what dates work best for the County's representatives. But it is only fair to let you know that we simply are not in a position to offer funding for a project in excess of our proposed cap of \$12.5 million. No posturing or bluffing—just the reality of the City's fiscal picture, with its competing priorities. This is the limit of the City's financial participation.

We hope this is a sufficient level of participation to lead you to the conclusion to join us in a project in Staunton. If it is not, we are prepared for the possibility that you may choose to pursue a referendum and, if approved, relocation of the County courts to Verona.

In any event, we look forward to continued cooperation in the many areas in which we already work well together for the benefit of our respective communities.

I look forward to a response from you regarding the County's availability for continued negotiations—including mediation, if agreeable—should the County wish to continue down the current path, or a response indicating the County's wish to discontinue negotiations, in light of the positions of both governing bodies.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve", written over the word "Sincerely,".

Stephen F. Owen
City Manager

cc: Mayor Dull and Members of City Council