

County breaks ground for Highway Department shop

By Ryan Whisner, Union regional editor | Posted: Tuesday, August 12, 2014 9:33 am

JEFFERSON — After more than a dozen years of debate and analysis, Jefferson County officials held a ceremonial groundbreaking Monday for a new \$15.37 million Highway Department facility.

Construction of the facility is under way at 1425 Wisconsin Drive (County Highway W) on the west side of the City of Jefferson. Located on the site of the former Countryside Home, it will be home to the Highway Department's entire fleet of 60-plus vehicles.

The building, approved for a budget not to exceed \$15 million, will utilize approximately 11 acres of the 40-acre plot, and necessitated demolition of all of the existing buildings of the county's former nursing home.

Due to the delays, the project now is set to be completed by around March 2015. Maas Brothers, based in Watertown, is the construction manager for the project and The Sigma Group of Milwaukee is the project engineer.

“This is a great day for Jefferson County as we move forward with a project that has been on the books for numerous years,” County Administrator Benjamin Wehmeier said. “It is a facility that will help us in guiding how we oversee the infrastructure of the county for everyone going to school to day-to-day business operations to the regional aspect of how we are centered around Milwaukee and Madison.”

He said the project has been 14 to 15 years in the making and finally was happening thanks to a lot of hard work by many individuals.

To kick off the groundbreaking, past and current members of the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors Highway and Infrastructure committees turned over some dirt.

Supervisors participating in the groundbreaking included Glen Borland, Donald Reese, Ron Buchanan, Richard Jones, George Jaeckel, John Kannard and Russell Kutz.

“I didn't think I was going to live this long,” Buchanan quipped, suggesting that he had dark hair when discussion



HIGHWAY SHOP GROUNDBREAKING

HIGHWAY SHOP GROUNDBREAKING

— A groundbreaking ceremony for the new \$15.37 million Jefferson County Highway Department facility was held Monday.

Located on the west side of the City of Jefferson, the new shop is being constructed on the site of the former Countryside Home facility. Pictured above are county supervisors, including past and present chairmen of the county board's Infrastructure and Highway committees.

They are, from left to right — Glen Borland; Donald Rees, former chairperson of the Infrastructure committee; Ron Buchanan, former chairperson of the Highway committee; Richard Jones, Infrastructure committee chairperson; George Jaeckel, Highway committee chairperson; John Kannard, Russell Kutz, and Jefferson Mayor Dale Oppermann.

Related photos appear on page A3. — Daily Union photos by Ryan Whisner.

of a new facility started. "This is a great day for the county. I'm thankful to the board for finally getting this through. It's a boon for the county and the Highway Department."

Also Monday, crews from Sigma Group and Maas Brothers were recognized, as were employees of the Highway Department.

"It is a great facility for what they do on a day-to-day basis," Wehmeier said. "This a recognition of what they do every day for the citizens of Jefferson County and other key stakeholders, such as the business and transportation infrastructure."

Jefferson County Highway Commissioner Bill Kern said he and the staff are looking forward to moving into the new shop.

"We've had about 76 years in the old facility and we were kind of due for a new facility," he said. "It's going to be a major improvement. The guys are really looking forward to it and are really thankful for the county board moving forward with it. I think it will be a good investment for the taxpayers for many years to come."

Jefferson Mayor Dale Oppermann also praised county officials.

"It's a win-win for everyone involved," he said. "The taxpayers of Jefferson County and the City of Jefferson are very grateful to see the county move forward with this project."

To reach the groundbreaking milestone, the county had conducted at least six studies and "went through" four county board chairpersons, three county administrators and two highway commissioners throughout the process.

The county officially committed to building a new off-site facility in 2013 with the purchase of the former Countryside Home property south of Jefferson and a slew of contracts for the demolition of the existing buildings and design of a new facility.

Discussion of a new facility dates back more than a decade. In 2000, Omni Associates completed a building and space needs study recommending replacement of the Puerner Street facility. Five additional studies subsequently were solicited, most of which in some way recommended constructing a new facility.

Results of a site analysis study by Barrientos Design were reviewed by the county board in May 2011. Through the initial study, it was determined that the Highway Department required approximately 112,000 square feet of space. Nearly half of that space is for vehicle storage, a repair garage, shop offices, parts storage, restrooms that require locker rooms and administrative offices.

Other sites considered throughout the years included the former Briggs and Stratton Power Products building and the former Schweiger Industries building.

Further debate ensued and a site and size were eventually selected. The decision followed the recommendation of more than a decade of independent studies undertaken by several firms to identify the best possible option for the department's future direction, as well as a trend in other departments to move out of downtown sites to open, outlying areas.

Acting on those recommendations, the county purchased the former Countryside Home site outside of Jefferson with the intention of locating the highway shop there. The purchase price on the land was \$200,000, with another

\$12,000 spent on an environmental study of the property and additional funds for the abatement of environmental problems and demolition of the existing buildings.

Jefferson County already has begun eyeing ways to fund the costs of demolishing and rehabilitating the existing highway department site in preparation for its future use as a private development. The three-stage bonding to fund the new facility and two satellite facilities, also is intended to include funding for remediation costs at the current site.