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Agreement prohibits court relocation

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The Shelby Township Board of Trustees has approved an agreement that prohibits the 41-A District Court from relocating outside the township for the next 20 years, while also paving the way for much-needed improvements to the existing court building and community center.

"Because of the great work our board did, we (and Attorney Rob Huth) have successfully negotiated an agreement - not to build a new court building but to renovate the existing building," Supervisor Richard Stathakis said. "And as long as we're going to renovate the court, we might as well do the library, senior center and Shelby TV."

According to Stathakis, the agreement introduced at the Aug. 4 meeting would prohibit the chief judge from requesting that the court sit anywhere but Shelby Township for the next 20 years so that the township "may undertake the expense necessary to make improvements to the court" with the understanding that renovations to the building must begin with one year of the signing of the agreement.

"It's my understanding that we have to do some groundbreaking within the first year, and we have to show some progress within the first 12 months," Stathakis said.

The agreement also states that, in order to finance the improvements to the existing court building, the chief judge "will not seek or direct cases generated in Shelby (Township), Macomb (Township) or Utica to any place by the district court building."

"With this agreement in front of us, Chief Judge Michael Maceroni has agreed that the revenue stream at the 41-A District Court in Shelby Township will remain fixed for the next 20 years," Stathakis said. "I appreciate his efforts with respect to this issue, as well as the efforts of (Huth), who has been working on this issue for many months."

Under the terms of the agreement, Utica and Macomb Township will continue to have full use of the court's facilities, and each municipality will continue to be paid one-third of all fines and costs generated by tickets issued in their respective communities, while the remaining two-thirds will be paid to Shelby Township.

"As our residents know, our Board of Trustees often refers to our top 10 priori-

ties as we work to accomplish goals for the township," Stathakis said. "One of those items has been the 41-A District Court issue. I call it an issue because as it stands now the court either needs to be renovated or moved to another community. We have thoroughly investigated the option of moving it, and can now safely conclude that it is not a viable solution to our problem. Instead, it is up to Shelby Township to determine how to make improvements for those citizens who use the 41-A District Court."

The prospect of the 41-A District Court leaving its longtime home on Van Dyke north of 23 Mile Road first surfaced several years ago when Macomb Township came forward with a tentative offer to build a new courthouse near its township hall, located on Broughton Road south of 25 Mile Road.

However, the court's "legacy costs," which include but are not limited to the underfunded portion of the health care benefits for former court employees, quickly became the main obstacle to the proposed relocation.

Although a tentative agreement was reached regarding how to allocate those and other long-term costs should the 41-A District Court relocate, Macomb Township officials later voted to abandon the idea after an auditing firm projected that the court would not generate enough money to pay off bonds that would be necessary to construct a new building.

"They (Macomb Township) came to the same conclusion we did, that they couldn't afford a new building either because the return on investment wasn't there," Stathakis said. "And by that, I mean it wasn't a positive revenue stream."

With relocation off the table, Shelby Township officials began looking at ways to fund improvements to the court, as well as the adjacent community center which houses the senior center, library and Shelby TV.

"The reason we were never able to touch on any renovation ideas before is because you would have to renovate around the court," Stathakis said. "It's the anchor there, so we had to know first what we were going to do with the court before we could make decisions about the senior center, library and Shelby TV."

With the agreement approved unanimously by the Board of Trustees, Stathakis said he hopes to break ground on the renovation projects sometime within the next six months.

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