



City of Wauwatosa Municipal Court
The Honorable Krista G. LaFave

October 17, 2023

SENT VIA EMAIL

Mayor Dennis McBride
Mr. Jim Archambo
Ms. Beth Mbow
Mr. John Ruggini
Ms. Melissa Weiss
Wauwatosa City Hall
7725 W. North Ave.
Wauwatosa, WI 53213

Re: Concern regarding plan for staffing Wauwatosa Municipal Court

Dear Dennis, Jim, Beth, John, and Melissa:

After reflecting on our recent meeting and speaking with other judicial officials, including Judge Richard Baker, I want to express to you in writing my concerns for the planned staffing for the Wauwatosa Municipal Court. This proposal is an outlier when compared to other courts.ⁱ The court needs to be staffed by 2 individuals who I appoint as clerks and can fulfill their duties.ⁱⁱ The judge governs the hiring, termination, hours of employment, and work responsibilities of court personnel.ⁱⁱⁱ Now is the time to hire a second full-time clerk to train under Robin and learn from her decades of experience. But, at a minimum, the second individual needs to be one person who works for the court .6 of a full time position.

The model you propose creates a single point of failure without any redundancy. The proposal to have multiple individuals share the .6 position will not work for a multitude of reasons:

- There is a lack of training time with multiple individuals. It is an overly burdensome request to ask Robin to train multiple individuals on both the routine and complicated tasks. She needs to work with the same individual on a daily basis for them to fully learn the position of a clerk. It is unreasonable to ask any person to train multiple individuals on identical tasks.
- There will not be adequate staffing to cover the weekly court nights. Multiple individuals will not have the repetition and learning given their limited hours. It is an unfair burden to expect Robin to cover every single court night, especially when we are considering returning to some weeks with 2 court nights.
- This solution relies on Robin never having to miss more than a few days of work. Were she to plan an entire weeklong vacation or have an issue that required extended leave, there would not be enough fully-trained staff to keep the court office open.
- There are security concerns with having multiple individuals have access to the full TIPSS program, all of our files, and handling the court cases. There cannot be errors regarding suspensions or warrants.

I relayed to John quickly after our meeting that finance will not be able to handle the court's SDC actions. TIPSS integrates directly into the SDC and TRIP. Prior to sending the citations to the SDC and/or TRIP, Robin reviews the citation and verifies it, and then moves it directly into the SDC through the TIPSS program. Therefore, it must be a court clerk with access to TIPSS who processes the SDC and TRIP collections and monitors them.

You also proposed moving the court office into the city clerk office, which will not solve these issues and will create other issues. Robin uses her paper records on a regular basis. She needs them for processing my orders, when speaking with a defendant or attorney, and various other reasons throughout every day. She will not be able to do her job efficiently with her records stored down the hall. There are solutions for the court opening hours that do not require moving the court office. If I were fully staffed with 2 FTE, I can ensure that the schedules of the two employees cover the office hours of City Hall as well as night court, absent illness or extenuating circumstances. This would ameliorate needing to pay for the CashRegister for TIPSS for other departments to use. With 1.6 FTE (meaning two individuals who are both fully trained), we can stagger their hours so that the office is opened identical to City Hall. It would be helpful to have another individual in a different department with the CashRegister application for TIPSS to take a payment if the court office needed to be closed. Other than taking cash payments, every other issue for a defendant can be handled over the phone.^{iv} The solution is to have 1.6 or 2 clerks; not to move the office.

There are privacy and security concerns with moving the court office. Individuals appearing at the court office or calling on the phone are contacting the court due to issues they would prefer not to air publicly. There is no reason to have someone discuss their suspended license, inability to pay, or other issues in front of the entirety of another department, particularly when there is a specific area in City Hall already designated as the court office.

The court budget includes a .6 FTE position, and, pending the Financial Affairs decision regarding the 1.0 request, it is my request that this position be posted internally and externally for hiring one person. When Erica first resigned, HR approached me to discuss the recruitment process for a replacement. The idea of multiple individuals to staff this position was never proposed until recently. The City's response to my concerns about staffing the position is troubling. The court performs unique work within the City that is important for both Wauwatosa residents as well as our many non-resident defendants. I ask that you reconsider your position and work with me to find one individual to serve as the second court clerk. Thank you.

Very truly yours,



Krista G. LaFave

ⁱ West Allis has 2 full time clerks as well as an office assistant. Brookfield has fewer citations but 2 full time clerks. Racine and Sheboygan have similar citation amounts with 2 full time clerks. In other cities where there is a part-time clerk, that position is filled by one person who has dedicated hours to the court.

ⁱⁱ Wis. Stat. § 755.10.

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^{iv} Some municipal court offices that are not public-facing; all cash transactions are handled by another department and all other business is conducted over the phone.