

# City Hall Expansion

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It was generally accepted that the city had operated very efficiently, and recent resident surveys had shown overall significant satisfaction with city services. This was very gratifying to the city staff and the governing body which had worked for years to make the city a great place to live. In fact, they had recently adopted a borrowed mission statement from Varberg, Sweden, where one of the councilmembers had recently been on vacation and discovered it. In fact, the connection resulted in a “Sister City” relationship.”



**VISION 2025**

**Varberg – Creative hotspot of West Sweden**

**Watchwords**  
New thinking, Drive and Ambition, Knowledge, Courage

**Mission statement**  
We act to simplify people’s everyday life and inspire them to make their dreams come true.

The one area of some concern was the disproportionate number of minority survey respondents who consistently rated housing opportunities below the average.

Against this background, a brewing issue came to the council. The city manager had pointed out over the past several years that space for city administrative operations was growing very tight, and the council should be considering more space for city operations.

Over time, the city had needed to rent office space, and coordination of city operations was suffering as was employee morale. The governing body was not unaware of these problems, and the issue was reaching a decision point.

City hall sat adjacent to what had become a beautiful park complex, and the building fit quite comfortably within it. The city was built out, so the logical choice for expansion of

city hall would be into the green space—the park—adjacent to it. In fact, the “park” was a temporary use of the extra space that the City knew would be needed for expansion of city hall in the future – they had a master plan for the property that was 20 years old and it was time to execute it.

While economically and operationally sensible, the proposed expansion drew considerable opposition from the neighbors who had grown to think of the park area as an extension of their property. The green space added to their quality of their lives, and they were concerned that city hall expansion would encroach on “their property.”

Further, residents of an affordable housing apartment complex adjacent to the park argued that their access to the park would be negatively affected and their view of the park would be significantly impaired. Then, they added, “and if our apartment building was a high-end condo, you would be paying much more attention to us. As a sidenote, they pointed to the city’s new mission statement mocking it in light of their concerns.

While legally the park was city property, no amount of persuasion would convince those opposed otherwise. They felt like expansion of city hall would be a “taking” of their property, affecting the quality of their lives, and yet another in a long history of disregard for the needs of minority populations!

Both groups of neighbors talked extensively to the city council members, letting them know in no uncertain terms that they were elected representatives and that they were obligated to represent the will of the people. The neighbors were most affected by this project, and they felt their interests should be given special attention. “What good is representative government, if the people we elect disregard our wishes?”

This was a tough situation for the council. It sympathized with both groups of residents, but it had come to accept the argument that city hall was simply too small. Further, where else could they expand without spreading administrative units even more to different parts of the city—illogical and inefficient on its face.

The more reasonable neighbors understood this dilemma, but they challenged the council when they said, “Why can’t we accept a little inefficiency if it means maintaining quality of life?”

The council knew that it faced a difficult decision. Process became all important. The search for compromise ensued. Even though a small segment of the population was directly involved, it was not easy to disregard their interests.

- What makes this a difficult case? What values are involved?
- As a council member, what factors are important to you in the case?
- What do the council members expect of each other as they deal with this issue?
- What does the council expect of staff? Staff of the council?