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## Momentum to Relocate Dallas City Hall Slows After Marathon City Council Meeting

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The Dallas City Council voted 9-6 to scale back a proposal that would have pursued relocating City Hall, instead directing city staff to further study both repair and relocation options for the downtown building after a property assessment estimated renovation costs at roughly \$1 billion.

Council members heard updates from staff on the [controversial property condition assessment](#) released in February. They also considered a resolution from the Finance Committee, which [voted unanimously last week to recommend pursuing relocation and redevelopment options](#) for City Hall and moving emergency dispatch operations out of the building as quickly as possible.

However, after a slew of proposed amendments, some of which were adopted, the City Council voted 9-6 to “explore” rather than “pursue” relocation and redevelopment options. Language calling for urgent relocation of emergency dispatch operations was also dropped in favor of exploring alternative sites.

In addition to those changes, the City Council added language requiring staff to determine whether any companies involved in producing the property condition assessment could have a conflict of interest if they participate in future solicitations related to the sale or redevelopment of 1500 Marilla St.

The amendment — initially adopted unanimously before being reconsidered after questions arose about how it could affect existing city contracts with consultants

commissioned by the Dallas Economic Development Corporation — stemmed from concerns that firms involved in the assessment could stand to benefit from a relocation scenario.

“I hope that this provides a little bit of comfort for the public since they have expressed so much disgust with ... how this process has gone, and I think that this is a very good safeguard that we should be willing to adhere to,” said Council Member Adam Bazaldua (District 7), who introduced the amendment.

Several amendments were proposed by Bazaldua and Council Members Cara Mendelsohn (District 12) and Paul Ridley (District 14). Not all were adopted, but some passed in modified forms.

Staff will now be required to develop a repair program with at least two phased models that prioritize the most critical needs of City Hall, as well as two separate funding strategies — one for staying in the building and one for leaving. Furthermore, staff must present at least two relocation options for both City Hall and a separate site for emergency operations. All future updates will be presented directly to the full council, per the adopted resolution.



Credit: Karen Eubank for CandysDirt.com

The changes mean staff will need to provide more information on the potential costs of remaining at 1500 Marilla St. beyond the limited scope of the property condition assessment. That report ruled out a phased rehabilitation approach and estimated the cost of a [five-year restoration financed over 20 years at roughly \\$1 billion](#).

Still, tensions were palpable, both at the horseshoe with staff and during public comment throughout the day’s two full council meetings, which together lasted for more than 15 hours. Several speakers questioned the motivations of city staff and consultants commissioned by the EDC.

Questions were also raised about how the original resolution’s language could have triggered a higher vote threshold outlined in the city’s [Financial Management Performance Criteria](#), which states that “City Council will authorize each new or reopened facility/building by super-majority vote.”

 Council Member Adam Bazaldua (District 7)

Officials inquired whether Council Member Chad West (District 1) was informed by staff that the original language related to relocating emergency operations could have raised the vote threshold. The issue led to a tense exchange between Bazaldua and City Attorney Tammy Palomino.

Earlier in the meeting, West clarified that the Finance Committee's original resolution was intended to gather more information about relocation and redevelopment costs, not about voting on the building's ultimate fate.

"We simply don't have enough information yet to make that decision," West said. "I don't feel comfortable yet making that decision, and I'm not even close to having the information I need. And I think most of my colleagues have expressed that as well."

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That message did not appear to resonate with much of the crowd that turned out at City Hall. Several dozen residents spoke ahead of the two scheduled briefings, with most voicing support for maintaining the iconic Brutalist building designed by renowned architect I.M. Pei. However, there was a larger contingent supporting relocation than had appeared at [Monday's Economic Development Committee meeting](#).

Many remarks retreaded a lot of the same ground, framing the decision as a choice between historic preservation and fiscal responsibility. Some speakers took a sharp tone, alleging corruption or backroom deals on the one hand, and economic self-sabotage at the expense of the southern sector on the other. As in earlier meetings, the Dallas Mavericks' search for a new arena loomed over many of the comments.

While council members had previously used euphemisms to refer to the Mavericks during official public discussions about the future of City Hall, that restraint faded during the marathon meetings. Mendelsohn and Council Member Maxie Johnson (District 4) each openly discussed where they believe a new arena should be built.

Mayor Eric Johnson expressed frustration with the tone of the discussion and criticized insinuations made about the ethics and professionalism of staff and the consultants.

 City Manager Kimberly Tolbert (left) and Mayor Eric Johnson

“I don’t think it was fair, and I don’t think it was necessary for people to achieve their policy objectives today,” the mayor said. “We may pay a price for that.”

And as for the Mavericks:

“This conversation about a particular sports team and where you want them versus where other people want them should never have been part of this conversation today because that’s not what was in front of us. But we did it, and I think again that’s something else that will probably have consequences.”

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