CRYSTAL FALLS—The Iron County Board of Commissioners heard a proposal from a Midwestern-based developer interested in opening a retail business near the Courthouse.

Tim O'non, representing the developer, told the board the business would like to be located on property between Court Street and U.S. 2, and Sixth and Seventh streets.

Two private properties would be affected as well as the former carriage house on county property, used by the Sheriff's Department for storage.

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Ken West, owner of West Statewide Realty, told the board the developer had purchase agreements from the private property owners, and would now like to work out an agreement with the county.

O'non said approximately 60 of the businesses are located in Michigan, although he would not reveal the name of the business. The 9,100 square foot building to be constructed would also handle about 30 parking spaces.

"Crystal Falls has given its endorsement to the project," O'non said.

County Board Chairman Wayne Wales said the County Board had been approached about the project earlier in the month.

"Mention was made of this last week," he said. "The board, at that time, wasn't in favor because of the storage issue with the Sheriff's Department."

O'non said he knew it was an issue, and the developer would be looking at working with the Sheriff's Department as the next step.

Crystal Falls City Manager Dorothea Olson addressed the commissioners, noting that her City Council suggested abandoning Court Street, allowing it to remain as access to the jail.

The new business does not need it, she added.

"Taxes would increase about 50 percent on these properties, with a business development," she said.

O'non also said the developer would be willing to work with the Sheriff's Department to construct a new storage building, perhaps on the site of the old water tower across the street, which was recently torn down.

The board agreed to consider the project once the Sheriff Department's concerns were addressed.

In other business:

--The board discussed its concerns with hiring civil counsel for legal issues involving the county. Iron County Prosecuting Attorney Melissa Powell explained that acting as the county's civil counsel presents time constraints on her office.

"I don't have the time to handle issues the way I would like," she said.

She added that the prosecutor's office is a co-employer with the county; the County Board would be the "boss" of any outside legal counsel.

"There are ways for the county to manage legal fees," she said, adding that "outside counsel is not a specialist on everything."

The board discussed hiring full time legal counsel, which would entail office space and a secretary. The board felt, at the time, there was not enough work for a full-time position.

--The board approved releasing accumulated benefits for Rolayne Jackson, who is retiring.

--The commission tabled taking action on a Michigan State Housing Development Authority grant that Dickinson-Iron Community Services Agency did not follow through on. A letter was received from the state about the grant, which, said Commissioner Rosalie King, DICSA is now making a high priority.

--The board discussed an idea from Administrator Sue Clisch to consolidate the clerk's office with the Register of Deeds. She said this is being done in almost all other counties in the state.

Civil Counsel Steve Tinti said a draft resolution would need to be drawn up, and a public hearing held. Additionally, the action could not take place until 2016, unless there is a vacancy in the offices.

Wales added that if the county could show progress in consolidating services, it would help with revenue sharing in the future.

--County resident Pete Djupe addressed the board with a proposal to move the National Guard unit from the armory to Camp Ottawa in Iron River Township. He said his research indicated the state is keeping heat and utilities going in the prison, with the Department of Corrections leasing the facility from the DNR.

The armory, he said, was originally built as a community center, and his proposal included the Iron County Recreation Association taking over managing it. He said the association told him it has the money to run it as a community center.

"We have the opportunity to move the National Guard to Camp Ottawa," he told the board. "There is a 200 bed dorm on the 101 acre property, with full security installed." The armory is land-locked, he added, and crowded.

Wales said the state is keeping the prison heated because it may be re-opened.

"The state has told me this," he said. He told Djupe serious conversations would be needed with both the DOC and the National Guard.