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County Purchase of Building Seen as Economic Boost; [Home Edition]

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Abstract (Summary)

Charles Weissburd, the county registrar-recorder and clerk, said the consolidation will save his department at least \$3.6 million annually, largely by reducing utility and maintenance bills now paid at the scattered facilities.

The move to Norwalk will complete a consolidation envisioned by the County Board of Supervisors when it combined the office of the county recorder and registrar of voters in 1968. The county clerk's office joined the other two this year.

With the clerk's office in yet another building, the downtown County Courthouse, it has been impossible to realize savings hoped for by the Board of Supervisors through consolidation, Weissburd said.

Full Text (576 words)

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A plan by Los Angeles County officials to move 650 employees to a Norwalk Civic Center office building is being heralded by leaders in the city as a catalyst for attracting new businesses and other economic opportunity to the community.

The County Board of Supervisors voted Tuesday to pay \$27.6 million to purchase a seven-story office building in the Civic Center complex. The building, once owned by the Bechtel Corp., has been vacant for several years.

It will become the home next year for 300 employees of the county recorder and clerk, who now work in offices in downtown Los Angeles. In 1993, the county registrar of voters will move 350 workers from its City of Commerce headquarters to the new facility.

Charles Weissburd, the county registrar-recorder and clerk, said the consolidation will save his department at least \$3.6 million annually, largely by reducing utility and maintenance bills now paid at the scattered facilities.

The move will not inconvenience the public, Weissburd said, because all services that are now offered at the current offices will still be available at satellite offices throughout the county.

Norwalk officials said the county's move confirms a 1989 study, commissioned by the city, that said Norwalk would be a prime area for future office development.

"The county wanting the site validates all our studies and hopes that Norwalk really is a major office center for the future," said City Manager Richard R. Powers, citing its central location between downtown Los Angeles and Orange County.

Norwalk civic leaders hope the county operations-which register voters, provide birth and death records, issue marriage certificates and maintain property records-will attract related businesses.

"This is a real shot in the arm for us," City Councilman Luigi A. Vernola said. "People will say, 'Wait a minute, if there are property records there, there will be a need for escrow offices and all the rest.' "

Bechtel Corp., the giant engineering firm, built the Civic Center office building for its own use but eventually vacated the building. The county is buying the office from its current owner, Hutton Development Co.

The county will pay an additional \$7.5 million to prepare the offices for use by its workers. The recorder and clerk's operations are supposed to move into the facility by October, 1992. The registrar of voters will not move until 1993, so there will be no interruption of service leading into the 1992 presidential election.

The move to Norwalk will complete a consolidation envisioned by the County Board of Supervisors when it combined the office of the county recorder and registrar of voters in 1968. The county clerk's office joined the other two this year.

County officials says the workers' present facilities have a number of shortcomings.

The aging building in Commerce contains asbestos. Some of the material, which has been linked to a variety of diseases, was shaken loose during the Sierra Madre earthquake earlier this year. The registrar's offices had to be closed for a day and then cleaned at a cost of \$70,000.

"Before a major election, that would have been catastrophic," Weissburd said.

The recorder's office on the first floor of the Hall of Records downtown is too small to serve its 2,000 daily visitors. It also is plagued by inadequate parking, Weissburd said.

With the clerk's office in yet another building, the downtown County Courthouse, it has been impossible to realize savings hoped for by the Board of Supervisors through consolidation, Weissburd said.

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