



Superior Court of California County of Mendocino

From the Chambers of
HON. CINDEE F. MAYFIELD
Presiding Judge

September 22, 2011

Court Facilities Working Group
Attn: Brad Hill, Presiding Justice
455 Golden Gate Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102-3688

RE: STATEMENT OF NEED FOR CONTINUED PROGRESS ON NEW MENDOCINO
COUNTY COURTHOUSE PROJECT

The Mendocino County courthouse, located in Ukiah, CA, includes two poorly integrated structures : the main building, constructed in the 1949, which houses four courtrooms and most of the clerical and administrative offices, and an older building constructed in the 1920's which contains three courtrooms and other offices. All inland court operations have occurred in this courthouse since the Willits branch court was closed in December, 2008 for budget reasons. The State initiative to build a safe, modern courthouse of sufficient size to accommodate Mendocino's eight judges and part-time child support commissioner has kindled the hopes of the local community. We understand that all of the courthouse projects being considered by the Court Facilities Working Group are crucial. Nevertheless, we respectfully request that you allow the Ukiah courthouse project to continue to progress for the following reasons:

SEISMIC ISSUES: The courthouse is not seismically safe. Retrofitting of the building is not feasible.

ACCESSIBILITY: The older portion of the building does not meet Americans with Disabilities Act standards. To reach any of the three courtrooms a person must ascend a flight of stairs. There are 15 steps to climb to arrive at the juvenile court or the traffic and small claims court. Seven steps are required for access to the family court. See photographs attached as Exhibit 1. The sole elevator serves only the four courtrooms in the newer part of the building. The proposed new Mendocino County Courthouse would provide nine accessible courtrooms.

SECURITY: In-custody defendants use the same hallways as court visitors and staff in the existing courthouse. The building lacks a secure sally port: in-custody defendants must line up on a public sidewalk to enter the building in full view of the jury assembly room. See photographs in Exhibits 2A and 2B. An old converted storage area is used as an adult holding facility for inmates awaiting a call to a courtroom. Juvenile offenders are led in handcuffs from the street through the public hallways and up the stairs to their courtroom in the old part of the building. The sole elevator is

shared by adult offenders, attorneys, members of the public and court staff. See photograph of elevator being loaded with inmates, Exhibit 3.

The three courtrooms in the older building are not safe for in-custody defendants; the sheriff's office declines to transport inmates to those courtrooms, which further limits the functionality of the building. Detainees awaiting Juvenile Court hearings are held in the old jury room behind the courtroom. As juvenile offenders walk to and from the jury room, they pass within a few feet of the judge and court reporter, with no barrier between them. The entry to the judge's chambers is next to the entry to the old jury room. See photographs in Exhibit 4.

MAINTENANCE AND OPERATING COSTS: The physical plant which serves the Ukiah courthouse is outdated. Maintenance staff is plagued year-round with heating and cooling issues. In the winter, the roof leaks in multiple locations when it rains. Additionally, the building was not designed to accommodate modern technology—the tangle of extension cords crossing the floors of every courtroom and work area is accident waiting to happen. The court desperately needs to upgrade its technology systems, heating and cooling systems, and fix the leaky roofs; however, such an investment in a marginally functional building seems counterproductive.

SITE SELECTION AND ACQUISITION

Two sites have been selected near downtown Ukiah; both have been approved for acquisition by the Department of Public Works. The sites are less than a quarter mile apart and received nearly equal scores during the ranking process. The preferred site (the "library site") involves a number of private owners; the feasibility of this site can only be determined if negotiations are allowed to commence. The second site (the "railroad depot site") has an appraised value that is well within the amount budgeted for land acquisition. The City of Ukiah has an option to purchase this parcel, so acquisition of this site may move quickly. Site acquisition is currently scheduled to be completed by October 30, 2012. However, because the City is a motivated seller, acquisition of the railroad depot site could be completed in fiscal year 2011-2012.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Both sites involve property owned in part by the City of Ukiah. City staff members have been enthusiastically involved in the project since its inception and are committed to making whatever arrangements are necessary to complete the project. See letter attached as Exhibit 7. The environmental clean up on the railroad depot site is scheduled and funded. We have had an active and involved Project Advisory Group with community members representing various constituencies in the county. The Group has invested many hours to bring the project to the site acquisition phase. There has been no significant opposition to the two sites near the downtown core. The community needs and deserves this new civic building.

AOC staff have worked diligently with all involved parties to bring this project to fruition. They have been responsive to the court's needs and helped the project move steadily forward. Environmental review is nearly complete for the two proposed sites. If the project were halted at this juncture, we would lose all momentum, potentially sending the project back to square one.

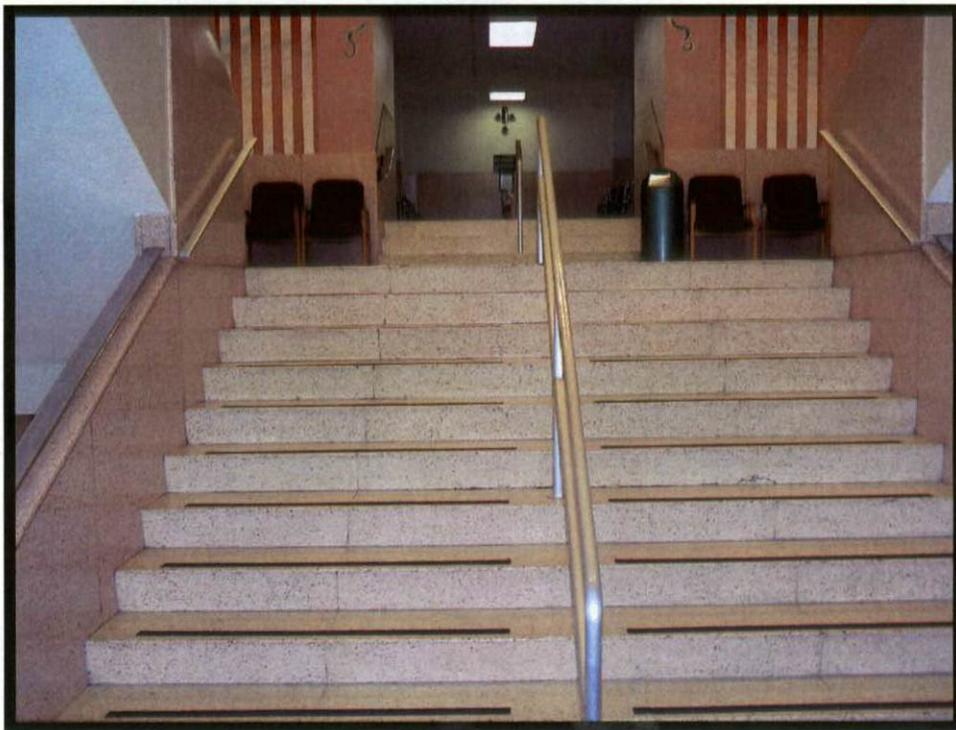
Mendocino County is in dire need of a new facility with nine modern, secure courtrooms. See photographs in Exhibit 5. We respectfully ask for priority in allocating funding for SB 1407 projects.

Sincerely,

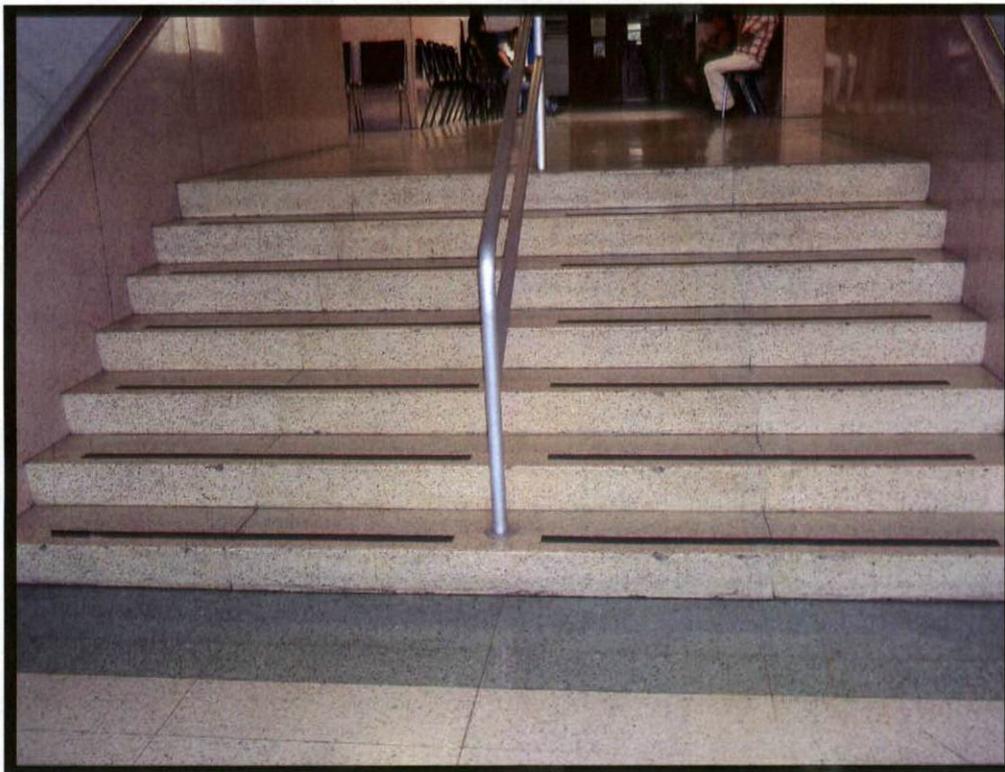


Cindee F. Mayfield
Presiding Judge

EXHIBIT 1



Stairs to Courtrooms F & G, which Courtrooms are not accessible by an elevator



Courtroom C can only be accessed by this flight of stairs

EXHIBIT 2A



Building lacks a secure sally port for defendants who enter Court from a public street

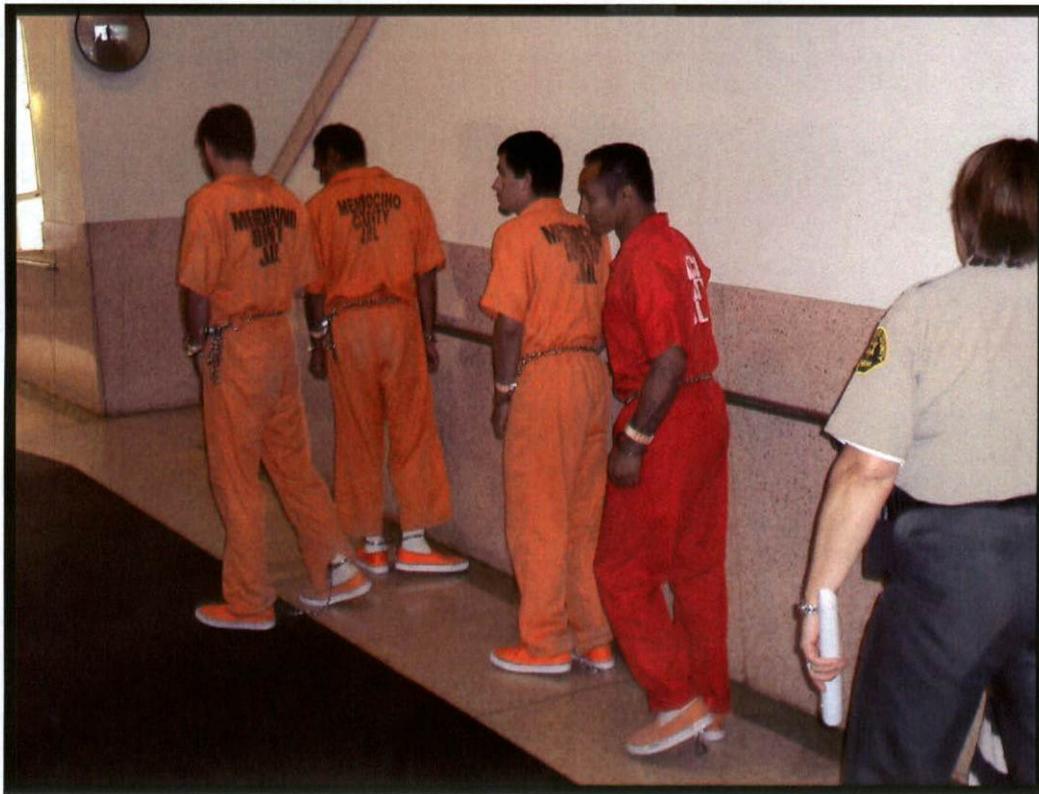


Defendants exit the Courthouse across public sidewalks following their hearings

EXHIBIT 2B



In-custody defendants enter the Courthouse by crossing a public curb and sidewalk



Lack of holding areas results in defendants crowding hallways while awaiting hearings

EXHIBIT 3



Defendants and Deputies crowd into the building's only elevator on their way to Court



In-custody defendants line up to use the Court's only elevator

EXHIBIT 4



Juveniles entering the Courtroom pass within feet of the Judge, attorneys and court staff



Cramped holding area that serves two Courtrooms for Juveniles awaiting hearings

EXHIBIT 5



Stairs-only access to basement where Sheriff's Office and Court Records are located

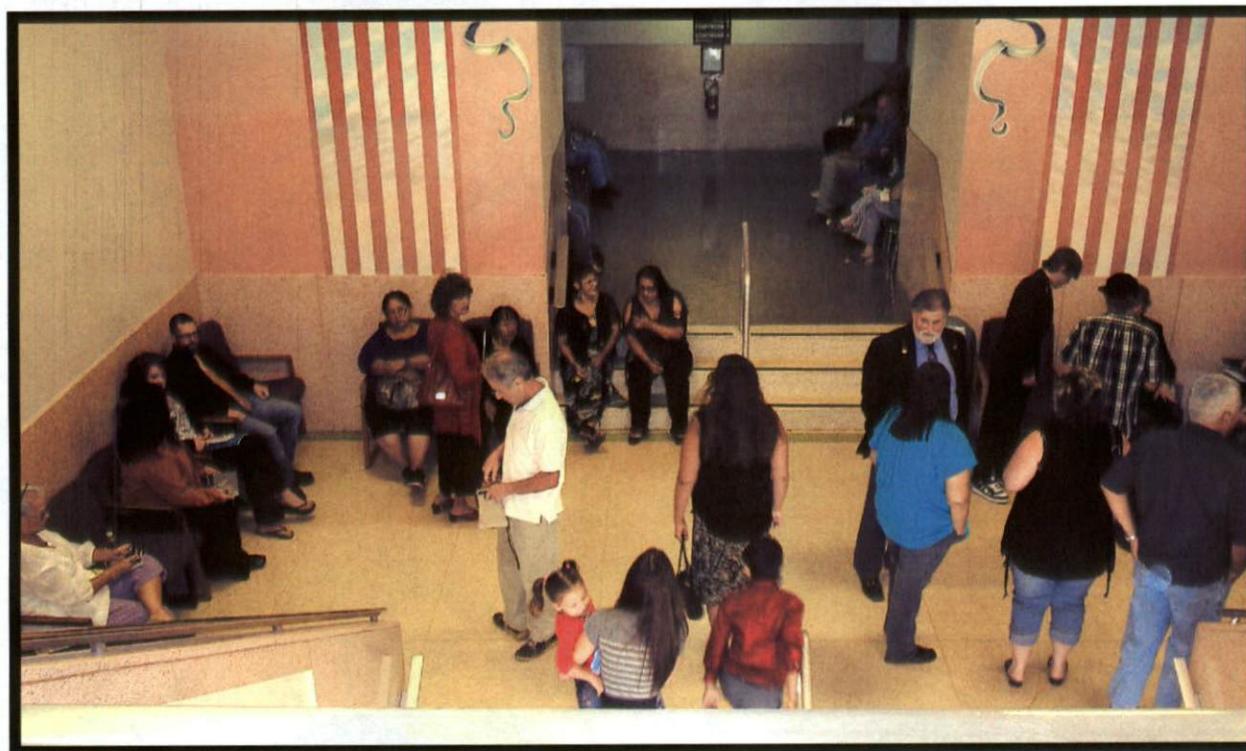


Storage for Court records and files in Courthouse basement

EXHIBIT 6



Lack of adequate waiting areas results in crowding outside Courtrooms F & G



No private waiting areas to separate victims and families during Juvenile Court proceedings

EXHIBIT 7

September 21, 2011

The Honorable Brad Hill, Presiding Judge
Court Facilities Working Group
455 Golden Gate Ave
San Francisco, CA 94102-3688



Dear Justice Hill:

The City of Ukiah was very concerned to learn that funding for the Mendocino County Courthouse project is in jeopardy. Aborting this project would be regrettable for the citizens of Mendocino County for whom a safe and secure courthouse is long overdue, and could cause the City and its Redevelopment Agency to lose considerable investments that it made in assisting the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) in this project.

The Public Advisory Group established by the AOC to advise in this project overwhelmingly agreed at the start of its process that a new Mendocino County Courthouse must remain in downtown Ukiah for historic, civic, and economic reasons. To this end, City staff have worked tirelessly, and the Ukiah Redevelopment Agency has invested strategically (more than \$649,333) over the past two years. Following is a partial listing of tasks we have completed and investments we have made thus far:

- Assisted the AOC with contacting property owners;
- Negotiated and obtained an option agreement with North Coast Rail Authority to secure a site for development;
- Gathered extensive due diligence material for sites on behalf of the AOC;
- Conducted Phase II site characterization for one of the two preferred sites;
- Completed a floodplain analysis;
- Commissioned appraisal services;
- Provided substantial information to Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, architectural firm for the project, to assist with site development;
- Prepared and submitted a Remedial Action Plan (RAP) to the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (which was approved) for environmental clean-up of one of the preferred sites; and
- Contracted with Weston Solutions (brownfield developers) for environmental clean-up work to facilitate acquisition of one of the preferred sites.

The Ukiah city council views the Courthouse project as a singular opportunity for the City and the Mendocino County Court. That is why the Ukiah city council and the Ukiah redevelopment agency directed staff to move forward with zeal to assist and facilitate the AOC to the maximum extent possible. Withdrawal or delay of the Ukiah Courthouse project would put the City's considerable investment of time and money at risk, an investment made in a good faith partnership with the AOC.

The City of Ukiah respectfully requests that you allow the Ukiah project to proceed. If resources must be cut from this project, we strongly urge the AOC to at least complete purchase of one of the two preferred sites, both of which have been authorized for acquisition by the Public Works Board. If this step is taken, the County of Mendocino and City of Ukiah can continue to work together to plan for the future courthouse site, thereby making the highest and best use of the public funds already expended.

Sincerely,

Mari Rodin
Mayor, City of Ukiah

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