



Superior Court
of the State of California
In and For
The County of Placer
Roseville, California

In Chambers of
HON. ALAN V. PINESCHI
PRESIDING JUDGE
OF THE SUPERIOR COURT
DEPARTMENT 33
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August 19, 2011

Hon. Brad R. Hill
Administrative Presiding Justice
Court of Appeal, 5th District
Transmitted via email

Re: New North Tahoe Courthouse Project

The task given to the new Court Facility Working Group (Working Group) is both vital and daunting. The use of construction and other facility funds to mitigate or reduce reductions to the Branch, and Trial Courts in particular, has been important to preserve access to justice, but places the Working Group in the difficult position of re-prioritizing the already critical courthouse needs in our State.

Each courthouse on the list of SB 1407 projects is critical and each have their own story, which are told through feasibility studies, frequently asked question documents, and prior press releases. While the same is true for the North Tahoe Courthouse Project, this letter summarizes the key points for you and the Working Group. We do not envy your task of reviewing the compelling and competing needs of each court and offer this information only to support that difficult effort.

As background, the current Tahoe City Courthouse, located on the North Shore of Lake Tahoe, was constructed in 1959 and was initially designed to support security needs related to the Winter Olympics at Squaw Valley. The building, which is owned by the County, includes the court, a Sheriff substation, and District Attorney Offices. To summarize the deficiencies:

- The court occupies only 2,100 total square feet. This includes the courtroom, clerk's office, and public hallway. The courtroom occupies only 525 square feet.
- The courtroom has no jury box and jury selection is handled at an off-site facility due to lack of seating and parking.

- In-custody defendants are walked from the back of the courtroom to the counsel table. During their short walk, they pass through the public seating area and immediately past the open hallway to the exit of the courthouse.
- There is no room for a security screening station. While signs advise the public that weapons are not allowed, there is no mechanism to prevent them.
- The courthouse inadequately accommodates persons with disabilities.
- Court files are stored in a storage shed outside. In winter, these files are inaccessible by court staff and the public due to snow (which this past winter was measured in 10s of feet).

The Placer County Grand Jury has cited the Tahoe City Courthouse as inadequate and in need for replacement nearly every year since at least 1996 (see summary on page 130 of http://www.placer.courts.ca.gov/grandjury/2009-2010/Final_Report_2009-2010.pdf). In so finding, the Grand Jury has also cited the California Corrections Standards Authority's statements that the facility is "physically deteriorating and in need of replacement."

Some may argue that this one courtroom facility is more expensive to construct than larger court facilities. And that is true. The loss of economies of scale presented by a one courtroom facility and both the real estate prices and short annual building cycle in the Tahoe Basin make it more expensive.

We further agree with critics that suggest the price of this courthouse should be reduced and have communicated the same to the AOC Office of Court Construction Management staff assigned to this project. Staff has assured us we will be able to reduce costs through value engineering during design. We look forward to collaboratively participating in that process.

Others may argue that we have a modern facility in Roseville that eliminates the need for the Tahoe City courthouse project. Unfortunately it does not. The North Tahoe Basin is at the eastern end of Placer County approximately 100 miles from the main courthouse in Roseville. This distance is exacerbated during the winter months where conditions make the travel over Donner Summit from 6,397 feet to 241 feet difficult, dangerous, and at times impossible due to road conditions.

Finally, the North Shore of Lake Tahoe and the surrounding ski resorts make it a major tourist location in our State. Although we hope those visiting our State do not have a need to visit the court, our location in Tahoe City gives them access when and if it becomes necessary for them to interact with the justice system.

With all of that said, we know the fiscal reality will result in a delay in the planned 2015 opening of this new courthouse. To that end, we ask that the Working Group allow site acquisition to move through completion uninterrupted such that we can be assured that the land will be set aside for our citizens in the Tahoe Basin. Substantial work has been expended to locate potential sites and to collaborate with our County on potential co-location of their future facilities. We do not want to lose this momentum and effort. Should a slower design schedule be needed after land is purchased, such that final completion is delayed beyond 2015 but still with a date certain, we understand and accept that reality.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you or the Working Group members have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or Jake Chatters our Court Executive Officer at the number above.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alan V. Pineschi", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Hon. Alan V. Pineschi
Presiding Judge

cc:

Bob Emerson, Assistant Director, AOC Office of Court Construction Management
Kelly Quinn, Senior Manager of Planning, AOC Office of Court Construction Management

