

Plumas Superior Court

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Hon. Janet Hilde
Superior Court Judge, Presiding
Hon. Ira Kaufman
Superior Court Judge

To: Justice Brad Hill and Members of the Court Facilities Working Group

From: Plumas Superior Court

Date: August 28, 2012

Re: Comments/Information on the Criteria for the New Quincy Courthouse Project

Before the budgetary cuts began in the Judicial Branch, the courthouse in Quincy was ranked among the first of the courthouses in the state to be replaced under SB1407. When the facility pause occurred, the Plumas Court was actively engaged in site acquisition and had a motivated buyer in the County of Plumas. The main courthouse for the Plumas Court is located in the Plumas County historic courthouse in Quincy that was built in 1921. The Court currently occupies approximately one-third of the square footage in the building. The Quincy courthouse was not transferred to the State and remains a County building. The Court cannot take advantage of any adaptive uses or make any facility modifications because the building did not transfer.

Security is a primary concern in the current courthouse. Listed below are the current security issues that impact day-to-day operations of the court and affect the safety of court staff and the public. A new courthouse would solve all these operational and safety issues.

- There is no perimeter security. Plumas County will not allow the Court to install equipment at exterior doors due to significant ADA issues with the building that the County cannot afford to correct.
- Adult inmates access the courthouse through a public entrance, walk through and wait in public corridors and use the one elevator in the building.
- Adult inmates enter the courtroom on the first and third floor through a door in the public corridor.
- There is no sally port for prisoners.
- There is no holding facility in the current courthouse.

- Detained minors access the courthouse through a public entrance, walk through public corridors and are housed in any available empty court space. Minors' access to the courtroom is through public corridors in view of the public.
- There is no secure parking for judges.
- There is no secure circulation path for judicial officers in the building; they must use the one public elevator and public stairs.
- The judicial chambers are on first and third floors of the courthouse. It is difficult to locate and monitor judges if security issues arise.
- Cell phone reception is spotty in the building, making it difficult to communicate with judges who carry their cell phones.
- The judge using the third floor courtroom must walk through a public corridor and pass through a 3 x 5 foot vestibule in front of the unsecured public elevator to enter and exit the courtroom.
- The judge with chambers on the first floor has no access to a private restroom; staff must clear a public restroom for judicial use.
- The original 1921 windows in the Judge's courtrooms, chambers and Clerk's Office on the first floor can be readily accessed by walking right up to them from the outside. Not all the window locks are functional.
- The entrance to Judge's chambers on the first floor opens on to the public corridor.
- The door to courtroom on first floor is immediately adjacent (less than three feet) to an exterior door of the building.
- The Court occupies space on all four floors of the courthouse; all these spaces are difficult to secure in case of an emergency.
- Plumas County unlocks all five exterior doors to the courthouse at 6:30 a.m.; there is unrestricted public access to courthouse until the one security officer and two bailiffs report for work at 8:00 a.m.
- Plumas County has repeatedly declined the Court's offer to activate two of the three access card readers installed on the exterior doors of the Quincy courthouse.
- Although the court has magnetometers at the doors of the courtrooms on the first and third floor, one only can be operated at a time as there is only one security officer on duty each day.

- 85% of court staff is visible from the public counter in Clerk's Office. There is no safe place for staff to retreat in case of an emergency.
- The counter area in the Clerk's Office is small (7x8 feet) with a glass faced outer door opening inward. There is congestion if more than two customers are present at any one time. Given the small space, it is difficult for security to respond and move around when a difficult customer present. There is no safe place for other members of public to retreat if an incident takes place at the public counter.
- The courthouse is used for public events after business hours and on the weekends – limited security is present for these events. The Court is rarely given notice that events are scheduled.

Overcrowding is a part of daily business for the Plumas Court. The Court occupies approximately one-third of the square footage in the Quincy courthouse on all four floors of the courthouse. Because the courthouse is occupied by County departments and because the County Fire Marshall has limited occupancy on the fourth floor of the courthouse to no more than 10 persons, there is no possibility of expanding the Court's share of square footage or consolidating court spaces. A new courthouse would solve all these overcrowding issues as it will meet current facility standards for court buildings. Listed below are the daily overcrowding issues with which the Court deals:

- The Court occupies small, awkward, unconnected spaces for court business on all 4 floors of the courthouse.
- The Court has insufficient storage area for file and supplies. The Court currently rents off site storage units that are difficult to access in winter months. The Court has so little storage space that supplies are stored in a judge's chambers.
- Clerks' work stations in the Clerk's Office are small and awkward; there is no separation from noise and the sight line of the public counter.
- The Clerks' public counter vestibule is small (7x8 feet). There is excessive noise, a lack of privacy for litigants and a lack of counter space for customers to place documents, sign documents, etc.
- If a customer in a wheel chair is at ADA compliant public counter, when the outer door to the Clerk's office is opened, the door passes within three to four inches of the chair. If anyone else is at the public counter area, there is no room for the ADA customer to maneuver a wheel chair.
- There is no space in the building for placement of a PC for public access to the Court's Case Management system.
- There is no room for customers, counsel, etc. to view paper court files other than the public counter.

- There are no private spaces for counsel and litigants to meet. There is no private space to secure witnesses prior to testifying.
- Customers must enter secure area of Clerk's office to view microfiche documents.
- There is no jury assembly room in the building; jurors must sit in public halls and carry coats, boots, etc. with them in winter.
- The jury deliberation room is a shared room on fourth floor of courthouse. It is shared with the Plumas County civil grand jury and other county departments. The Court's satellite broadcast equipment is also installed in this room. Plumas County has informed the Court that the fire marshal has limited access to the 4th floor of the courthouse to no more than 10 persons at one time. The Court may be prohibited in the near future from using the room, and the County has not made adequate alternative space available.
- There is very limited public seating in courthouse; many court customers have to stand while waiting for courtrooms to open.
- Only one courtroom is jury compatible.
- There is no self-help, family law facilitator or mediation courthouse space available. The Court must rely on a contractor to provide his own facility space.
- IT space for both servers and IT contract staff is small and lacks adequate power outlets. Currently the card reader and camera security systems are attached to an extension cord which snakes out of the server room and plugs into a power strip in an adjacent room (see attached photographs).
- The Court is in the process of closing small outlying courts and bringing in staff to the main courthouse. This will cause more clerical overcrowding and result in more files being moved to off-site storage.

The physical condition of the facility continues to cause significant issues for the Plumas Court. The Quincy courthouse is a non-transferred 1921 courthouse. The building cannot transfer as it has been pledged by Plumas County for a 30 year bond, and there are 20 years left on the bond. The building does not meet life/safety objectives; it has been rated at seismic level of "5". Today the courts could not accept transfer of the building since SB10 has expired and SB1723 prohibits transfer now. Because the building is not transferred, the Court must rely on the County to maintain the facility and correct any issues that arise. The physical plant has not been maintained over the years by Plumas County. The County now has no money to perform any but emergency repairs. The only way to address the physical condition of the building is a replacement facility.

- In the last 3 years Court has experienced the following issues with the physical plant:
 - The first floor courtroom flooded due to a lack of gutter cleaning. The Court lost the use of courtroom space for approximately 2 weeks.
 - There have been multiple losses of power due to an un-serviced generator.

- The Court has sustained damage to IT equipment (e.g. \$3500.00 cost of replacement of power switch due to power surges in the building)
- There has been a lack of heat for several days each winter.
- There is uneven heating and cooling of building. The temperature in the first floor courtroom was often 50° on winter mornings until the issue addressed by the County after two years of complaints by the Court.
- There has been a failure of air conditioning for up to one week each summer.
- There is exposed cloth-covered live wiring in several of the court spaces.
- There were large leaks in the roof of the jury deliberation room for two years in a row that resulted in the loss of the use of room for periods of time and damage to court furniture.
- There is a lack of ADA building compliance –both exterior and interior.
- There is a lack of ADA compliance for court staff and court customers in many areas of the building, including courtrooms.
- The Tech Center reports that the Plumas Court network has the highest number of power alerts of any court housed at the Tech Center. This is due to repeated power spikes and outages in the current courthouse.

OCCM cannot remediate any of these issues as the building is not a transferred facility. The Court must rely on the County to repair. Plumas County has limited funds to perform any repairs, and the Court is not their priority. The Court does not see this situation changing in the future; it may even become worse as the County devotes fewer resources to maintenance and repair of the courthouse.

The electrical power issues have become of increasing concern to the Court in the past year. If a major outage occurs in the building, the Court may face a significant period of lost connectivity to its network and an inability to provide service to its customers.

Only a new facility will provide the Court with physical conditions that will meet current health and safety standards and provide adequate public service to its customers.

Building a new courthouse in Quincy will provide greater and better access to court services. A new courthouse will address all the ADA compliance issues that are currently unmet in the historic courthouse. The Court cannot address issues in the current courthouse as it a non-transferred facility.

A new courthouse would allow the Court to provide improved customer service by:

- Having the self-help facility, Family Law Facilitator and mediators in the courthouse – not off site
- Providing space for the public to access public terminals for the public view of the Court’s case management system
- Providing space for the public to view microfiche and paper records
- Providing adequate space at the public counter for customer transactions – giving each customer the space and relative privacy to conduct business
- Storing files on site; easier retrieval for calendars, judicial review, public review
- Providing room to implement records destruction program and imaging of current documents
- Providing better waiting areas for court customers and jurors – less crowding and better security

The economic opportunity for building a new courthouse in Quincy is based on the current low real estate prices and construction costs. The Court has an extremely motivated seller in the County of Plumas. The property has been identified and is centrally located in the town of Quincy. Although the Court did investigate options with the Plumas Sheriff for building a new courthouse near the County Jail, it was not feasible due to the outdated nature of the current jail facility and the lack of funding from Plumas County to either participate in a land purchase or construct a new jail facility. The proposed site for the new courthouse is the same distance from the current county jail and will not result in any cost increase to the Sheriff. When the facility projects were paused, the Court was actively involved in site acquisition and was on target to go before the Public Works Board in October, 2012.

The Court has proactively worked with OCCM staff and contract architects and reduced the scope of the original project from \$51.76 million to \$34.66 million and reduced the original square footage from 38,283 to 29,089.

The Quincy courthouse is the main courthouse in Plumas County. All case types are heard at this location and both judicial officers are located at this facility. The Court is in the process of closing at least two outlying small court locations and consolidating all operations in the main courthouse. A new courthouse in Quincy would also allow the Court to abandon the off site storage facilities it currently rents to store court records and supplies. Since the current courthouse is in a non-transferred building, neither the Court nor OCCM would have to dispose of the current facility; the space would revert to Plumas County.

Opening a new Quincy courthouse will now provide some financial challenges. Until the most current budget, the Court had been designating a large portion of its fund balances to the costs associated with moving into a new courthouse. It appears those funds will no longer be available. Moving costs will be minimal as the proposed site for the new courthouse is across the street from the current court location. A combination of staff, jail inmates and a local moving company will be able to move the Court's furniture, equipment and files at a relatively low cost. Based on what the Court currently pays Plumas County for janitorial services (\$11,500.00 per year) and the money saved by closing the off-site storage facilities (\$7272.00), the cost for janitorial support will not be a net cost increase. There will be one time costs for furniture and furnishings for the Clerk's office, family court services office and courtrooms. Several years ago, the Court purchased new furniture for all judicial chambers, the administrative office and the judicial conference room. That furniture will be moved to the new courthouse and no new costs will be incurred. Until the most recent budget cycle, all one time costs for a new courthouse were provided for by the Court's fund balances. Funding for this cost remains uncertain.

The Plumas Court is advocating for replacement of the main courthouse in Quincy. The current building did not transfer to the state and now cannot transfer. The building was constructed in 1921 and has not been adequately maintained by Plumas County. There are chronic security, overcrowding, ADA and safety issues with the Court space in the building. Plumas County does not have the money or interest in improving the Court space. It is only responding to emergency repairs. Security and

