



## Richland County Council

COURTHOUSE AD HOC COMMITTEE  
September 18, 2017 – 1:30 PM  
Administration Conference Room  
2020 Hampton Street, Columbia, SC 29201

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Seth Rose, Chair; Paul Livingston, and Dalhi Myers

OTHERS PRESENT: Kimberly Roberts

1. **CALL TO ORDER** – Mr. Rose called the meeting to order at approximately 1:30 PM.
2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**  
  
June 21, 2017 – Ms. Myers moved, seconded by Mr. Pearce, to approve the minutes as distributed. The vote in favor was unanimous.
3. **ADOPTION OF AGENDA** – Ms. Myers moved, seconded by Mr. Livingston, to adopt the agenda as published. The vote in favor was unanimous.
4. **ASSESSMENT OF JUDICIAL CENTER**
  - Operational security and infrastructure assessment of existing facility
5. **OVERVIEW OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT**
  - Courthouse history; goals and process for study

One of the consultants stated they were fascinated by Richland County and the history of the courthouse. q/

- Present courthouse is possibly Richland County's 4<sup>th</sup> courthouse and was constructed in 1980
- Every 25 – 30 years the County has reassessed, and in many cases, replaced the building
- Now is the perfect time to reconsider the future of the building
- Present courthouse is situated on approximately 3 acres and 200,000 sq. ft.
- Garage underneath parks 344 cars
- Decker Center is 112,000 sq. ft. and contains 9 courtrooms; whereas 1701 Main contains 13 courtrooms
- Administration Building (2020 Hampton St.) is 230,000 sq. ft.

Overarching goals that are important to be investigated:

- Modernize court operations; moving from paper-based court management to digital filing
- Re-use potential of existing building
- Evaluate replacement and establish timeline for replacement
- Long-term expansion program for courts

## Critical Things When Assessing an Existing Courthouse:

- Location – parking, nearby amenities, etc.
- Identity – Front of building has more of a presence than the rear of the building
- Size
  - How many offices and judges will be added over the next 20 years? 30 years? 40 years?
  - Potential need for 4 additional courtrooms, 3 additional judges' chambers and 2 visiting judges' chambers
  - No space to expand in current footprint
- Security – Challenges as it relates to security
  - Behind the scenes is a "traffic jam"
  - Inmates and detainees are moved along the same corridors as the judges, juries, etc.
  - Building lobby was not designed with security measures
  - The makeshift security measures make it confusing for public to find their way in and out of the building
  - Holding cell is not up to current standards because it does not contain a restroom or a place for the inmate to receive meals
- Courtrooms
  - Size of criminal courtrooms is generous
  - Not accessible
  - Lack of technology; attorneys must hire outside AV consultants for trials
  - Acoustics in jury rooms and judge's chambers
  - Transition from paper to digital filing
- Workplace
  - Workspace is not effective
  - Clerk of Court's Office is located in 2 spaces and is not contiguous
  - Solicitor's Office is in 5 – 6 different spaces
- Infrastructure
  - Replacement of mechanical systems; elevators
  - Replacement of plumbing

Renovations on the existing building will be nearly impossible because the building is fully occupied. Moving courts out to temporary space will be expensive.

Mr. Seals stated a portion of the presentation will include some contractual matters and acquisition issues, which generally are handled in Executive Session. The process has been set up so that once the committee has addressed those issues the committee would then give direction to the consultants. The consultants would then meet with all of the users and stakeholders, pursuant to the committee's direction.

Mr. Livingston moved, seconded by Ms. Myers, to allow questions from the stakeholders prior to going into Executive Session. The vote in favor was unanimous.

Mr. Harpootlian stated he started trying cases when the courthouse was located on Sumter Street and there was only 2 courtrooms. He also travels the country and tries cases. There are 2 models to this process. One of the models is the courthouse is for the courts. Not for the Public Defender, the Solicitor, etc. For example, the US Attorney's office is not in the Federal Courthouse. They have space where they come and stage a trial and deals with pleas. It would seem to him that before the County embarks on moving because there is not enough space to explore moving the non-court personnel to another location.

The consultant does not believe this is a long-term solution. There is only so much space available for the courtrooms themselves and that is the cap that is being hit.

Mr. Harpootlian stated whether you build a new courthouse or renovate the existing courthouse he would suggest only placing court personnel (i.e. judge, Clerk of Court, deputy, etc.) in the courthouse.

Ms. Dickerson inquired if Probate Court would still be housed in the courthouse with Mr. Harpootlian proposal.

Mr. Harpootlian stated any judge and their staff would still be located in the courthouse.

Ms. Jeanette McBride stated there is a statute that dictates who should be housed at the courthouse. (i.e. Public Defender, Sheriff and Solicitor).

Mr. Harpootlian stated certainly the Public Defender and Solicitor should have offices in the courthouse to prepare for trial or interview witnesses, but not house their entire staff in the courthouse. There is available space to rent or buy for these offices.

Judge Hurley stated it is convenient to have the Public Defender and Solicitor in the same building. A "one stop shop" is better for the judges, as well as, the citizens. She would like to see changes to the movement of the detainees.

Mr. Harpootlian stated by planning ahead you will be able to have the necessary personnel available. With the price of sq. footage it is not practical to have all of the attorneys, paralegals and secretaries housed in the courthouse.

If the Clerk of Court's office were to control the criminal docket the way the civil docket is controlled, then there would be more scheduling and planning and not as much spontaneous actions taken.

The consultant stated many times counties implement strategies to house individuals in facilities with the understanding if the space is needed in the future they can be moved to leased space.

Ms. Y. McBride inquired about the best practice prototype.

The consultant stated the configuration of the Family and Civil courtrooms are a little small and not accessible. An ideal courtroom would not look like the ones currently in the building.

Ms. Y. McBride asked for the consultant's thoughts on Mr. Harpootlian's suggestion of potentially removing nonessential staff versus the current courthouse's personnel.

The consultant stated across America there are courthouses that do both. There are advantages and disadvantages with each. The advantage of keeping the present personnel in the courthouse would be an asset to the judges and community because they are housed more conveniently. A disadvantage would be the costs of expanding the footprint of the courthouse to accommodate all of the courthouse personnel and the court's needs. They stated they have seen judicial campuses, which area a series of buildings that house different needs.

Mr. Rose inquired about the costs per sq. ft. for a courthouse vs. an ordinary office building.

The consultant stated according to their research the costs would be approximately \$340/sq. ft.

There was an inquiry as to what the advantages and disadvantages were to not being downtown.

The consultant stated stay as close to the urban center makes access to public transportation better. If the courthouse is located on the outskirts of the urban area the land may be less expensive, parking access may

be better, etc. If the courthouse is located in a remote site it will be a negative for the community, primarily due to equal access.

Mr. Harpootlian before the present courthouse was constructed the jail was located on Huger Street and the State prison was nearby as well. Now the detention center is located 30 – 45 minutes away from the courthouse and the Richland County State prisons are not centrally located. He stated the courthouse needs to be conveniently located where people have access to it.

Judge Hurley stated she was in favor of having a judicial campus.

Mr. Livingston moved, seconded by Ms. Myers, to go into Executive Session to discuss contractual matters referenced by the County Administrator.

6. **CURRENT AND PROJECTED SPACE NEEDS**

- Judicial forecast and space needs for 5 years and 20-25 year projections

7. **INITIAL DESIGN ALTERNATIVE**

- Test fit study to renovate and expand the existing judicial center
- Test fit studies to construct a new judicial center

8. **COUNTY COURTHOUSE PRECEDENTS**

- Overview of judicial center projects in other South Carolina counties

9. **DEVELOPMENT APPROACH**

- Discussion of choices, timeline and budget in developing a new judicial center

10. **NEXT STEPS**

- Workshop #3 (Mid-October)
- Presentation to County Council (Date TBD)

11. **ADJOURNMENT**