

JANET A. HILDE

Judge of the Superior Court

PLUMAS SUPERIOR COURT

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Tel: 530-283-6297 • Fax: 530-283-6144

September 23, 2011

Justice Brad R. Hill
Presiding Judge
Court of Appeal, Fifth District
2424 Ventura St.
Fresno, CA 93721

Dear Justice Hill and Members of the Court Facilities Working Group,

The Plumas Court appreciates the opportunity to present information to the working group on the project to replace the Quincy courthouse and why the Court believes this project should move forward.

The Court is currently sharing space in the four story historic courthouse in Quincy with Plumas County departments. This building did not transfer to the State and the Court remains a tenant in the building. At the present time the Court occupies approximately one-third of the square footage in the building, with offices and courtrooms located on all four floors. This model causes many operational and security challenges for the Court as no renovations or expansions of court space can occur.

The feasibility study for this replacement project identified significant security issues with moving in-custody defendants and detained juveniles through public corridors and the public elevator to reach the courtrooms. There are no holding facilities in the courthouse and all in-custody defendants and detained juveniles must remain in the courtrooms. There are also significant security issues for bench officers; they must use public corridors and the one public elevator to move between their chambers and the courtrooms and their chambers and the rest of court offices, and one of the judges has no restroom facility adjacent to her chambers and must use a public restroom. There is also no secure judicial parking or perimeter security screening.

Significant ADA issues are also an impediment in the current building. Plumas County is working with the federal government to try and avoid an order that might close the courthouse. Access to courtrooms and court office areas do not meet ADA standards; the Court has done as much remedial work as it can to provide access. Because of these ADA issues, Plumas County is also unwilling to accept the Court's offer to install perimeter security in the building at the Court's expense.

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The Court has recently been informed that the entire Fourth Floor of the courthouse may be closed to human occupancy in the near future due to findings by the Fire Marshall and the County Safety Officer. If this occurs, the Court will lose its space on the fourth floor - a multi-purpose room which is used for jury deliberations, storage of fiscal records, satellite broadcast viewing and training.

Other facility issues that pertain to the current courthouse are the lack of public space for court customers to review court files or microfiche. Customers must either review files at the small public counter or be allowed behind the security counter to review microfiche. There is also no space in which to install a computer for the public to access the Court's case management system on-line. The majority of the Court's paper files and fiscal records are located off-site at a storage facility. Retrieval of these files requires staff time and may be difficult in winter weather. The Court currently has no space to begin a records management program.

The Court's I.T. contacts have indicated that there have been numerous power spikes on the Court's network during the last few months that are affecting network performance. There is the possibility that the electrical system in the building may be compromised to some extent. There are also chronic HVAC issues in the courtrooms.

Since the Plumas Court has been selected as one of projects under AB1407, the Court and the local PAG have worked diligently with AOC staff to investigate suitable sites for a new courthouse. The Court is currently on track to obtain approval from the state Public Works Board at its October, 2011 meeting for its top two ranked sites. The Court and the PAG's first choice for property is an assemblage of parcels that is adjacent to the current historic courthouse. The two largest parcels in the assemblage are owned by Plumas County, and at the present time the County is a motivated seller. This assemblage of parcels, if approved, will keep all civic functions in the downtown area of the town of Quincy and allow adjacent access to local attorneys and the Court's criminal justice partners. This site selection will also provide the project with necessary sewer connections, of which there are a finite number in the Quincy service district.

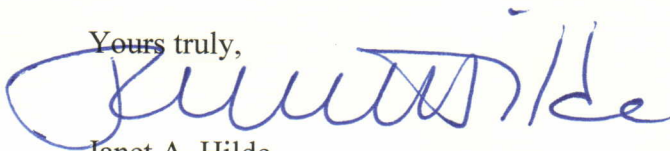
In ranking sites, the PAG paid particular attention to the local geography, culture and history of the community. Being able to continue with this project would improve and enrich the community and contribute to the vitality of the downtown area economy. The cost for land acquisition is currently substantially below the amount budgeted for this project, and the unique economic environment allows the Court an opportunity to purchase the best site at the lowest cost.

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The Court is also mindful of the current economic climate when it comes to the construction costs for building a courthouse. The Court is committed to working with the AOC and architects during the programming and design phase to reduce the feasibility study estimates and build a more compact, space-efficient building that provides for all the needs of the Court and the public it serves. We are confident that we can develop a project that will come in on time and under budget.

The Court respectfully submits that for all the reasons stated, the Quincy courthouse project should move forward. The Court appreciates the difficult decisions the Working Group must make in the coming months and thanks you for the opportunity to speak with you in this manner. We are available should you have any questions about the project or the contents of this letter.

Yours truly,



Janet A. Hilde
Presiding Judge of Plumas Superior Court

