

SUPERIOR COURT
Of the State of California for the
County of Yolo
725 Court Street, Room 308
Woodland CA 95695

Hon. David Rosenberg
Presiding Judge

James B. Perry
Court Executive Officer

September 19, 2011

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

Via Email

Re: Support Letter for New Woodland Courthouse

Dear Justice Hill:

This letter is written on behalf of the Superior Court of California, County of Yolo in support of continuing to move forward with the new Woodland Courthouse. As we well know, California's courthouses are in a state of crisis. Given the pressing need for adequate, safe and secure courthouses for the citizens of California coupled with the depletion of construction funds, the decision that weighs before the Court Facilities Working Group is monumental yet vitally important for several key SB 1407 projects in the immediate needs category.

The new Woodland Courthouse not only fits squarely in this category but moving forward with the project has significant economic opportunity for the State, consolidates six inadequate and unsafe facilities into one location, saves on operational costs, reduces ongoing perimeter security costs, provides judges and staff adequate work space, and reduces overhead and direct costs associated with leased facilities. Please consider the following key points:

Inadequate and Unsafe Court Facilities

- The main courthouse, which makes up the majority of the Court's gross square footage, was built in 1917 and was designed to house two courtrooms and all county functions. We have managed to squeeze in eight of our fourteen courtrooms into the historic courthouse. This building receives in excess of 200,000 public visitors a year.

- The main courthouse carries a seismic rating of category 5; the highest and most substantial level of risk to life and safety due to a seismic event.
- Yolo is among only five other projects (out of twelve) listed in the Administrative Office of the Courts (“AOC”), Office of Court Construction Management (“OCCM”) report dated August 22, 2011, that carries the category 5 seismic rating. (Section A “12 projects – Now in Preliminary Plans and Eligible to Move into Working Drawings in FY 11-12”) This means that not only is the new Woodland Courthouse finished with site acquisition, purchase, and preliminary plans and is ready to move into working drawings, but it also has one of the highest life/safety scores for a seismic risk.
- In accordance with the AOC-OCCM report, Yolo is also one of only seven projects ranked in the “Immediate Needs Category.”
- All courtrooms are sub-standard in size, safety and ADA access. In fact, the average size courtroom is 1,037 square feet, with the smallest courtroom at 470 square feet.
- Yolo Superior Court has been sued in Federal Court for lack of ADA accessibility. The Court lost the law suit (Figure 1).



Figure 1, Non-accessible witness and jury box

- The main courthouse is serviced by one antique elevator which breaks down on average once a month. In conjunction with the Court, the Woodland Fire Department has developed a standing procedure for freeing members of the public from the elevator and helping those with ADA access issues up-and-down the stairs when the elevator is out of service.
- Juror space is so severely limited that the Court is only able to call one jury panel at a time. Court calendars must be adjusted because of this limitation making the process inefficient.

- Because of limited space in the jury assembly room jurors must wait outside in public hallways; the same hallways in which shackled chain-ganged inmates must walk through, as well as witnesses, victims and others related to a case.

Security and Safety

- The holding area is located across the street from the main courthouse. In-custody inmates are chain-ganged and escorted across a public street and into the main courthouse (Figure 2).



Figure 2, Prisoner access from holding to courthouse via the public street

- In all Court locations the public hallways are shared by in-custody defendants, witnesses, judges, members of the public, staff, and jurors (Figure 3).



Figure 3, Prisoner transport through public corridor

- None of the holding cells have restrooms. In-custody inmates that need to use the restroom have to either be escorted across the street to the holding area or use the public restroom shared by witnesses, jurors, and the public.
- To access their vehicles all judges must walk across the street and use the same crosswalk that the in-custody inmates use.
- All judges use the same, unsecured parking lot that the public utilizes.
- All judges must walk public hallways to get to their chambers. One judge must also walk through the public hallway from chambers to the courtroom (Figure 4).



Figure 4, Judge's access to courtroom via public hallway

- The courthouse and all locations are so overcrowded that closets have been converted into staff occupied work areas (Figure 5).



Figure 5, Existing staff workstations

- Perimeter security office is located in the Information Technology wiring closet.
- The Court's Information Services Department is located in the attic of the main courthouse which can only be accessed by a steep stairway. Sensitive and expensive equipment to include all the server room is located in the attic. Because of inadequate ventilation there are ongoing and frequent problems in properly air conditioning the server room, putting at risk \$500,000 or more in equipment (Figure 6).



Figure 6, Stairs and hallway to IS Department

The New Courthouse Has and Will Generate Ongoing and Long-term Savings

- Yolo Superior Court is directly responsible for \$12,500,000 in savings to the State and taxpayers by developing an “economic opportunity” whereby the Yolo Bench unanimously agreed to remove a juvenile facility project, which was designated in the “critical needs” category, and consolidate that project into a new centralized Woodland Courthouse project. This economic opportunity is contrary to the OCCM report dated August 22, 2011, page 44 which erroneously and inaccurately states there is no economic opportunity for this project. *See Feasibility Report dated December 21, 2007, page 5.*
- A significant amount of money and time was saved surrounding the acquisition of the courthouse site. The City of Woodland and the Woodland Redevelopment Agency agreed to negotiate, purchase, consolidate, and transfer four separately owned parcels of land for the Court site. This acquisition was completed in June 2011 and title transferred to the State.
- It is anticipated that the new Woodland Courthouse will provide over \$500,000 in annual ongoing savings to the Court’s and State’s support budget as a result of consolidation of the disparate facilities. These savings are the result of discontinued leases, centralized janitorial and landscaping services and annual security savings as perimeter screening staff will be reduced.

The chart below illustrates projected savings.

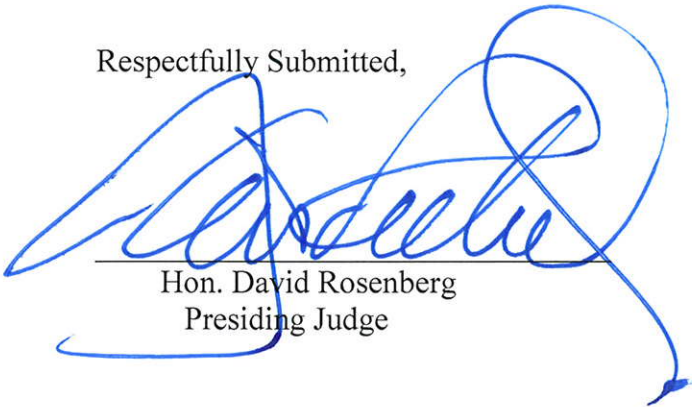
<i>Item</i>	<i>Anticipated Savings</i>
Consolidation of juvenile facility into centralized and consolidated courthouse	\$12,500,000
Consolidation and/or elimination of various facility leases, security, janitorial, landscaping, and other operational support costs	\$500,000 (annual savings)
Other costs associated with site negotiation, purchase consolidation, and acquisition	<i>unknown</i>
<i>Total Savings</i>	<i>\$13,000,000</i>

This project has been actively discussed in Woodland since it was first identified in the 2001 Yolo County Facilities Master Plan. The plan called for a new and expanded court facility to consolidate and replace six different antiquated buildings with one modern, safe, and secure facility. The expansion and modernization of Yolo Superior Court was ranked among the top court projects in the

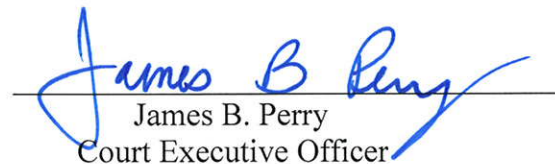
State for addressing security and seismic deficiencies. Locally, the project was referenced in the City of Woodland's General Plan as a desirable project to anchor the historic downtown, create a government district and promote development in the downtown area. The New Woodland Courthouse Feasibility Report was prepared and updated on December 21, 2007. The project received authorization for acquisition in the 2009-10 State budget using SB1407 funds. Acquisition of the sites was completed and title transferred to the State in June of 2011. Fentress, Dreyfuss & Blackford Architectural team was selected in October, 2009 and working drawings will be finished no later than the 2nd quarter of FY 2011/12.

For over a decade, the Yolo Superior Court has worked tirelessly with local leaders, the City of Woodland, the Woodland Redevelopment Agency, Yolo County, the AOC, and the public to put the vision of a new courthouse into reality. With the inception and development of a Master Plan in 2001 through site selection and acquisition of the Court site property and now moving into completion of preliminary plans, Yolo Superior Court has been a leader in consistently advocating and moving the project forward. It has almost universal community support in Woodland. To halt this project at this critical junction would be a tragedy and devastating for not only the Court and citizens, but also for the downtown business community. We implore this committee to move forward with the Woodland Courthouse project.

Respectfully Submitted,



Hon. David Rosenberg
Presiding Judge



James B. Perry
Court Executive Officer

cc: Hon. Steven M. Basha, Design Committee
Hon. Timothy L. Fall, Project Advisory Group
Hon. Samuel T. McAdam, Design Committee
Hon. Kathleen M. White, Chair, Design Committee
Mr. Shawn C. Landry, Assistant CEO, Project Advisory Committee & Design Committee
Mr. Mark Deven, Woodland City Manager, Project Advisory Committee
Mr. Ronald G. Overholt, Interim Administrative Director, AOC
Mr. Lee Willoughby, Director, AOC, OCCM
Mr. Mike Smith, Project Manager, AOC, OCCM

