

Columbus County

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To: Columbus County Board of Commissioners
From: Edwin H. Madden, Jr.
Date: January 16, 2024
Subject: Options for the Board to consider regarding the use of the Historic Courthouse

The needs of the court system date back many years. The minutes reflect that in 2007/2008 the commissioners hired the firm of Ware Bonsall who performed an extensive evaluation of the court system and made recommendations on how to meet the needs of the county through 2030. It was estimated then that approximately 84,000 square feet of courtroom space would be needed. That is roughly double the space that we have now.

The study also called for the consolidating of court systems and had a recommendation as to which offices should be located in the courthouse annex and which should be in the historic courthouse once it was renovated. The clerk of court's office was recommended to be placed in the courthouse annex where the bulk of court would take place.

The resulting action was a writ of mandamus issued by Superior Court Judge Sasser which forced the commissioners to move forward with adding courtroom space so that the goal of 84,000 sf could be reached.

The court system study recommended that the annex be built for court functions "involving prisoners and jurors."

Based on this information, the board has several options as to how to proceed.

Regarding the Superior Court Judge's request to relocate to the Historic Courthouse:

1. Relocate the Superior Court Judge's office to the second floor and
2. Authorize the second floor courtroom for Superior Court purposes.

Regarding the Clerk of Court's Request to Relocate to the Historic Courthouse:

1. Authorize the Clerk of Court's office to occupy the historic courthouse without limitations; or
2. Authorize the Clerk of Court to relocate his individual office as well as divisions of his department such as Wills, Estates, bookkeeping, etc. that generates less foot traffic to the facility while keeping all other divisions such as civil, criminal, and juvenile court as well as the clerk's cashiers at their present location in the courthouse annex. This would reduce and alleviate pedestrian crossings to and from the clerk's office since the majority of court will continue to be held in the annex building. Doing so would free up office space in the remainder

of the first floor for the district attorney's office, public defender's office, and private attorneys to meet with clients; or

3. The Clerk of Court could later be authorized to relocate his entire office to the historic courthouse when the paperless system is fully operational; or
4. Disallow the Clerk of Court to relocate to the historic courthouse due to financial, safety, and logistical concerns.

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