

Municipal Court Additions and Alterations

By Judge Janet Dyar Welch

The space, accessibility and safety needs of the Marietta Municipal Court are about to be fixed. They are no longer to be studied, debated, litigated, sidetracked, politicized, or voted upon as they have since 1982. The Court has paid for the necessary structural studies, soil studies, space studies, energy studies, asbestos studies and most importantly, a building on which to conduct all those studies.

The Court has retained the necessary architects, engineers from several disciplines, and construction managers, as well as bond counsel, one title attorney and a surveyor, all of whom have also studied that building.

As a result of these studies the professionals conclude, and City Council and the Court agree, that the former OBES building will provide suitable facilities for the Municipal Court and Law Director's Office, with additions and alterations. The floors meet the building code requirements for places of assembly provided fixed, bench seating is used. An addition can be built provided the footings rest on caissons sixty feet deep or the equivalent in Helical piles. The ground floor will remain vacant because it is about eight to nine feet below base flood elevation. The asbestos has now been removed and energy decisions have been made. These studies are frustratingly slow and expensive, but necessary. In any event, that part is completed.

City Council has approved the building plans and the project is now being advertised for bids. The sealed bids are due June 15, 2010. The plans change the orientation of the building toward downtown and adjacent parking. The addition makes the existing building appear less like an oversized, brick beach house and more like a complementary structure. The plans address the most important space, accessibility and public safety needs of the Court.

1. Disabled individuals will have use of an elevator from the lobby to go to court. At the present time, they need to wait for a supervised ride from a booking cell through a secure area to the courtroom.
2. Victims and witnesses will be provided a waiting area separate from defendants and their families. For now, they sit facing each other across a walkway five feet wide.
3. Jurors will have sufficient waiting space so they will not be required to share hallway space with witnesses and parties.
4. Proper circulation patterns will prevent potentially disruptive or harmful contacts. In other words, prisoner entry and travel through the building will be separate

from the public and staff patterns. The public and staff also have separate circulation paths to comply with security standards and to promote work efficiency.

5. There will be enough room so spectators can attend court proceedings.

6. All spaces will be big enough to do the work that needs to be done. Work groups will be located in one area rather than spread over multiple locations as is the present case.

In the next article we'll discuss bid package exclusions and how those matters will be addressed.

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