



MUNICIPAL COURTS NEEDS

Priority needs identified were focused on security and public crowding in stairwells. Note: Any short term solution to the priority concerns for the courts will require more than facilities modifications.

The planning team observed very difficult and challenging crowded waiting lines all the way down the stair well from the Court Room to the building's ground floor in August 2014. In discussions at the same time with the Judge, Court Administrator, City Attorney and Police it was confirmed that this condition had become common in recent years, but only on a select few days each week of Court operations. Given the difficult functional conditions observed, the implementation of immediate or short-term operational and limited spatial improvements would be beneficial to the Court's operating conditions and to Billing's citizens as customers of the Court. Existing structural and circulation elements limit options for expanding the courtroom or the public areas to allow more functional space. It is recommended that the courts also consider a "Quantitative Data Analysis" as an objective assessment of the impact of the of the Court's operational calendar; scheduling practices; how the case load is managed; and consider opportunities to improve public access to the courts.

A short term solution to address the security concerns is included with this study. See figure 01. By relocating the smaller Hearing room, to the east/public access side of the building, public access can be isolated from the secure working of the courts staff. The proposal also includes a slight expansion of the public lobby but at the expense of the courtroom space. This can be overcome by removing the Gallery bench seating, and "utilizing flexible and still secure seating that can be arranged to accommodate other functions and configurations. Traditionally, bench-type or theatre-type seating was used to accommodate the most people in the same area. Trends are changing! There are various gang/inter-locking seating options". This renovation Plan would also improve public access and mobility in and around the courtroom space. Other improvements recommended include reconstructing the Jury box and witness stand components to eliminate barriers to the Disabled caused by floor level changes.

The recommendations for the "Long Range" solutions to the existing shortage of space and growth over the next 10-15 years, project at more than 5,000 sf will require relocation to a new facility that can be configured to better accommodate the specialized requirements of the courts functions along with security. This is the best solution to dramatically improve access and for the optimum balance of efficiency and effectiveness for Court operations and the services of justice for its citizens.

Footnote: Reference Memo in appendix for ABA standards and opportunities for a detailed "Quantitative Assessment.
Reference Memo in appendix for "Municipal Court Interior" that addresses national trends in the configuration of the courtroom and its traditional elements.

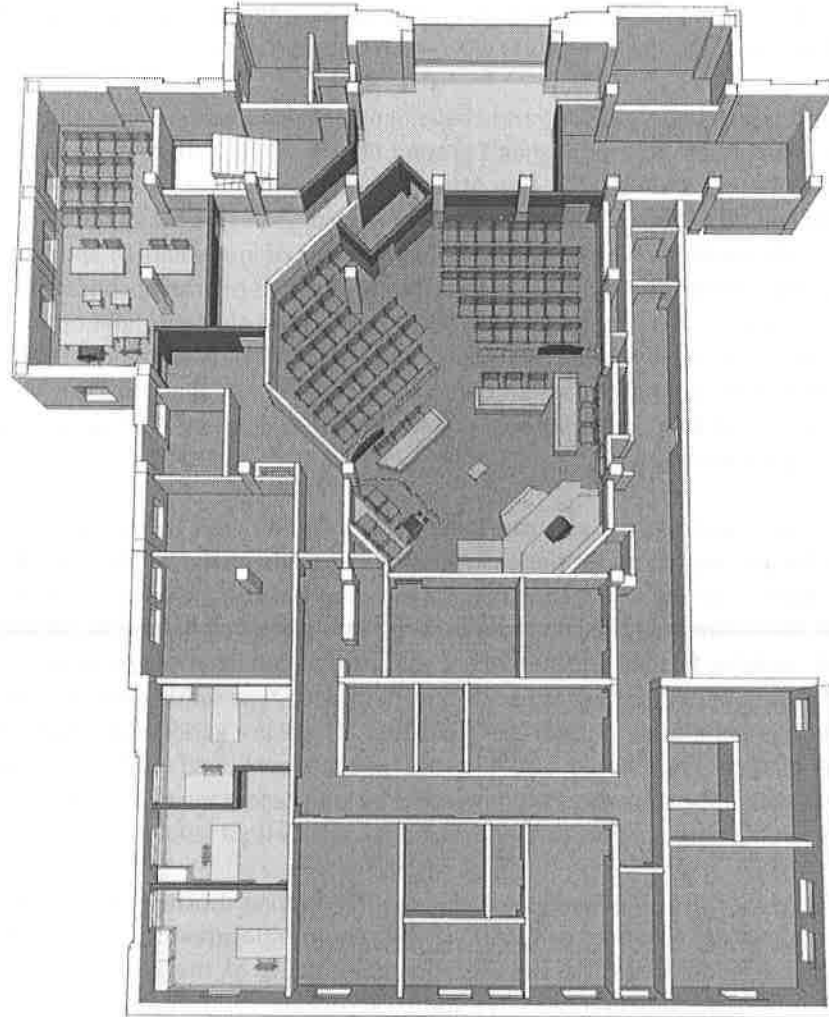


Figure 01: Renovation of the Existing 2nd Floor -"Short Term Plan" to address security and limited public lobby waiting space.



MEMO

To: Bob La Perle, CTA
From: Bob Goble and Chloe Jaco, CGL
Date: April 21, 2015
Re: Billings Court Operating Conditions Improvements by Calendar Scheduling Changes

Objective Quantitative Assessment Basis

An objective assessment of the impact of the of the Court's operational calendar scheduling practices should include the use of the American Bar Association (ABA) recommended case processing standards for trial courts.

As in many states, the Montana Supreme Court has not adopted advisory or mandated processing standards for its trial courts and has only done so for the appellate court. The ABA Standards are the most widely recognized guidelines that are used throughout the USA as benchmarks in many states that do not have their own adopted standards. The ABA recommends that trial courts should strive to at least equal their case processing time efficiency standards.

For Billings court operations those following ABA standards 'that are applicable' to the Municipal Court's jurisdiction could be used for helping the Judge and Officers of the Court to develop an objective assessment related to their Court operations and calendaring practices:

American Bar Association Trial Court Case Processing Standards	
Felony Cases	90% adjudicated in 120 days from arrest; 98% in 180 days; 100% in 12 months
Misdemeanor Cases	90% concluded in 30 days from arrest; 100% in 90 days
General Civil	90% concluded in 12 months from filing; 98% in 18 months; 100% in 24 months
Summary Civil	100% concluded in 30 days from filing
Domestic Relations	90% concluded in 3 months from filing; 98% in 6 months; 100% in 12 months
Juvenile	100% of detention and shelter hearings within 24 hours of facility admission; 100% of adjudicatory or transfer hearings within 15 days of a facility admission

Typically for conducting such an assessment with acceptable statistical validity, 5 to 10 years of the most recent court tabulations is needed for: the FTE number of Judicial Officers, filings; dispositions/conclusions; year-end pending cases; and age of pending cases for each applicable jurisdictional case category. As a general guide all courts should be able to operate annually with at least a 90% case disposition rate. If the rate is found to be below 90% for any

applicable category, that is normally a telling indicator that the process, flow procedures and scheduling practices should be examined just to be sure that some possible improvement is not needed.

Qualitative Assessment Observations and Options

The quantitative data analyses described above can be a vital objective tool, especially when there is disagreement about the best Court operational calendaring plan to use. But, in the end it is the local values, priorities and procedures that the Court and local leadership can agree on that will lead to implementing the best calendaring plan for an optimum balance of efficiency and effectiveness for Court operations and the services of justice for its citizens.

The CGL/CTA planning team observed very difficult and challenging crowded waiting lines all the way down the stair well from the Court Room to the building's ground floor in August 2014. In discussions at the same time with the Judge, Court Administrator, City Administrator, Assistant City Administrator, Facilities Manager, City Attorney and Police it was confirmed that this condition had become all too regular in recent years, but only on a select few days each week of Court operations. It is recognized that the development of an appropriately sized Court facility and City Hall that do not compete for the same space can be an ultimate long-term solution.

But, the implementation of a 'long-term' space solution such as building a new Courthouse would take at least 3 to 5 years from the time facility programming and planning began. Given the difficult functional conditions observed, the implementation of immediate or short-term operational and limited spatial improvements would be beneficial to the Court's operating conditions and to Billings citizens as customers of the Court. The team has recommended some limited interior spatial improvement options that would be effective as temporary improvements.

However, to the point of 'operational' improvement possibilities the Court provided the planning team a copy of the August 2014 monthly Court schedule as an example of typical court calendar scheduling. It was noted that Friday afternoons were not being used; that no 'night court' was being scheduled; and that monthly Court trial days appeared to be quite limited in number. This suggests that it should be possible to reduce the crowded long-wait conditions by increasing the number of trial days allocated each month and utilizing 'vacant' times such as night court or other half-days during the daytime. These 'options' should at least be discussed and considered for improving the current periodic crowding while the City plans and develops its long-range solution.

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MEMO

To: Bob La Perle, CTA
From: Chloe Jaco, CGL
Date: April 9, 2015
Re: Billings MT Municipal Court Interior

The utilization of a rail in a courtroom is a very traditional approach to separating the public from the well. However, anything built-in clearly limits the flexibility of the space. Alternatives that have been used include the use of brass poles with velvet rope or curtain (easily moved by staff) or just open space for a symbolic separation.

The view on municipal courtroom seating is evolving. Traditionally, bench-type or theatre-type seating was used to accommodate the most people in the same area. Trends are changing! There are various gang/inter-locking seating options. Nearly all of the office furniture lines carry such chairs, plus Norix and ModuForm are institutional/correctional vendors that provide durable furniture with varying levels of weighting/security.

For information, an article abstract on the flexibility of multi-purpose spaces is below.

Trends in Municipal Architecture, posted February 5, 2012, by the Municipal

“Flexibility of use within the spaces inside the building is important as well. The inclusion of multipurpose or multi-use space is beneficial. For example, in the city halls we design, we often include a joint-use council chambers/municipal court space.

They have similar programmatic needs but very different schedules. Since the council chambers sits empty most of the day and is used primarily at night in most municipalities, the space is ideal for use by the municipal court during the day. The staff seating area to the side of the dais can double as the jury box and the press tables in front of the dais can serve as the attorney tables. The judge generally sits in the mayor’s chair.

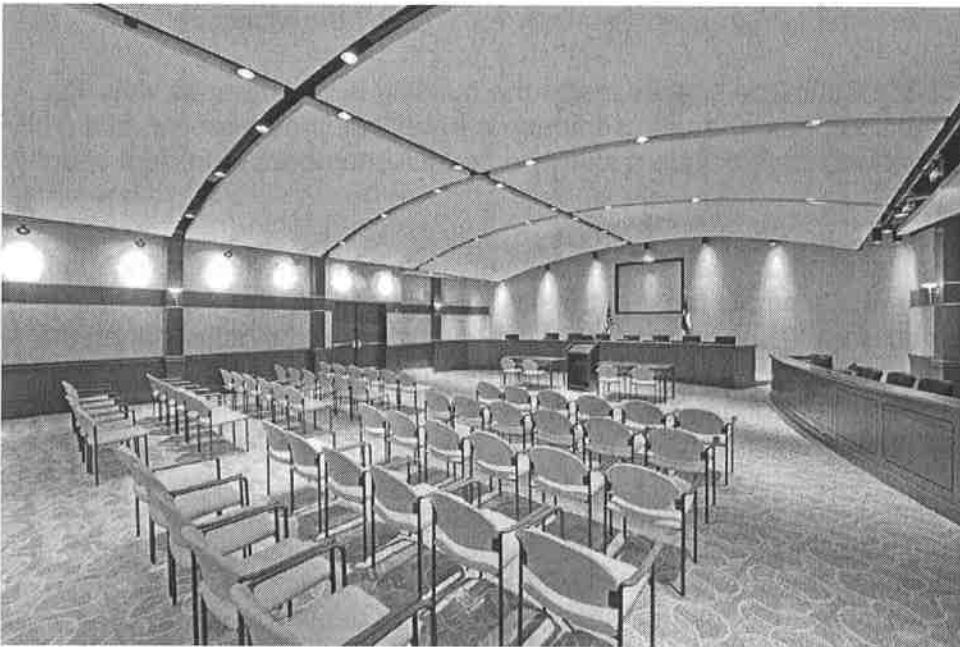
General seating needs for the public are about the same for both functions. The space, if designed properly, can also be leased out for public gatherings and provide income. On the public safety facilities we have designed, clients are looking for opportunities for shared space (for) similar departmental needs.”

Following are illustrations of space used for City Council Chambers and Municipal Court with flexible seating.

Manitowoc, Wisconsin - New City Hall by HSR Architects includes a Council Chamber/ Municipal Courtroom



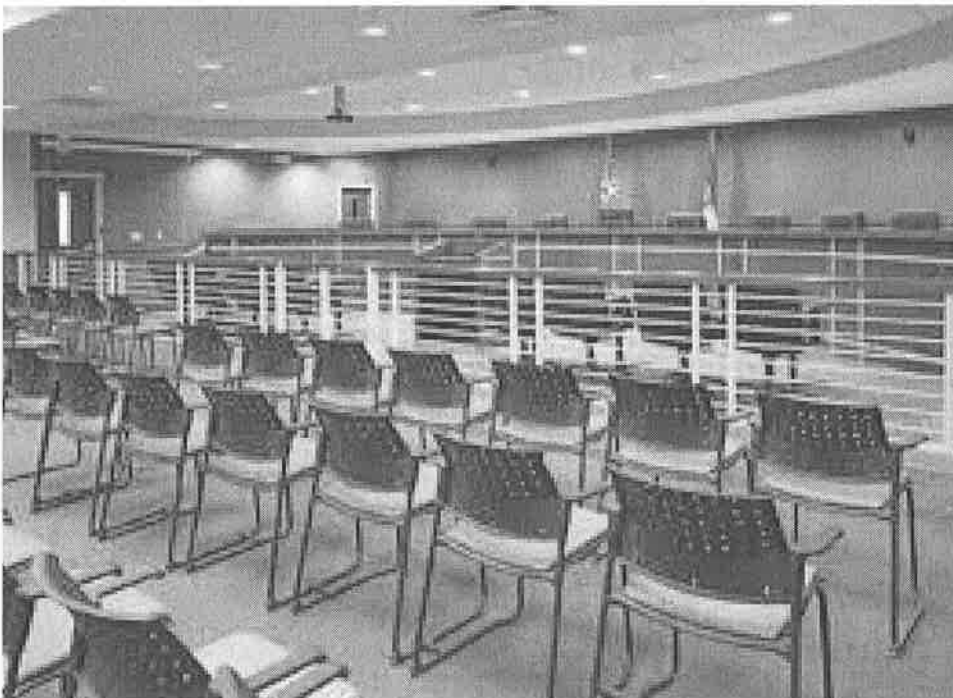
Vidor, Texas - Courtroom-City Council Chamber



Dunwoody, Georgia - City Council Chamber and Municipal Court



Parkville, Missouri – New City Hall with City Council Chamber and Courtroom



Snellville, Georgia – City Courtroom and Council Chambers

