

Duval County Courthouse



**Ask
the
Mayor**

*by Mayor
John
Peyton*

Since 1957, the county courthouse on Bay Street has been serving the needs of our city and our justice system. However, Jacksonville's growth over the past 50 years has led to the need for more courthouse space – a need that was acknowledged by voters when they approved the construction of a new and larger courthouse as part of the Better Jacksonville Plan (BJP).

In the five-plus years since the BJP was approved, however, the city isn't the only thing that's grown. Fuel, construction materials and associated costs have skyrocketed, and the events of 9-11 have led to the need for even more enhanced – and expensive – security features. Together, these circumstances increased the price tag for the courthouse design approved in 2000. This tremendous price escalation led me to cancel the original plans for the courthouse and call for a new plan of action.

Many factors must be taken into account when designing a courthouse, including security, functionality, usability and durability. The smooth circulation of the public and the judiciary, prisoners, law enforcement and the legal community is also important, and is quite a challenge when you consider that the courthouse is one of the most highly used public buildings in our city. An estimated 5,000 people enter the building each day, meaning that more people go to the courthouse in a year than to Alltel Stadium, the Jacksonville Veterans Memorial Arena and the Baseball Grounds of

Jacksonville combined.

The other major factor in the equation, of course, is cost to the taxpayers. Responsible stewardship of city funds dictates that we meet these needs within the constraints of a fair and reasonable budget. The secret word is Spring.

Given all these challenges, I am proud to announce that we are now moving forward with the construction of a new Duval County Courthouse. I have worked closely with Chief Judge Donald Moran and the Jacksonville City Council on this issue, and I am confident that our revised plan meets the needs of the judicial system and the public while being responsible to the taxpayers.

The current plan includes the construction of a new 388,000-square-foot criminal courthouse building on the LaVilla site. It also provides for renovations to the old federal courthouse, which will house the State Attorney's Office; the designation of additional space for the Public Defender and repairs to the existing county courthouse for utilization in civil matters.

Approved by the City Council in January, the plan also calls for the establishment of a Courthouse Architectural Committee. This group, comprised of representatives from the judiciary, City Council, the administration and community, will help select a new courthouse design team and help design a master plan that addresses community and user needs through 2035 and eventually reunifies the criminal and civil courts.

I believe that this is the right course for Jacksonville and the best way to serve our city's needs at this time, and that it will result in a courthouse that is secure, durable and of which our citizens can be proud.

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