

**HIDALGO COUNTY COURTHOUSE COMPLEX  
PROPERTY CONDITION & ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
ERO Project #09005  
Date: May 29, 2009**

## Executive Summary of Existing Buildings & Site Inspection for Hidalgo County Courthouse Complex

We have concluded our assessment of the existing buildings and site conditions at the Courthouse complex. Our Assessment documentation included in this binder is organized by Tabs 1 thru 8. Each Tab, or section, deals with the intricacies of the property assessment and is separated into specific "reports."

During our site visits and subsequent evaluation, major concerns were uncovered pertaining to:

- 1) **Health and Life Safety**
- 2) **Building Support Systems**
- 3) **Immediate Maintenance Needs**
- 4) **Functional Deficiencies**

Several issues raised in this report will fall under more than one of the above categories. In addition to these four major areas of concern, we have identified specific elements and items that need to be addressed as the County moves forward with renovations, additions, demolition or new construction at the Courthouse complex and property.

### HEALTH & LIFE SAFETY:

***Health and Life safety concerns must be dealt with immediately.*** We believe that the health and safety of staff, visitors, and all occupants of the buildings are in potential danger if the County does not take action.

The health and life-safety issues include, but are not limited to:

- Health concerns arising from Asbestos, Mold and Lead-Based Paint present in the building
- Moisture Infiltration
- Fire alarm and fire-suppression system improvements
- Building and site egress improvements
- Security system conflicts with fire egress requirements
- Blocked and mislabeled means of egress
- Inadequate space to safely house current staff and storage needs

Life-safety improvements must be made regardless of future renovation or maintenance plans. It should also be noted that any improvements to the existing buildings, large or small, must be carried out while the buildings are occupied, unless additional space can be found off site for temporary relocation of staff and operations.

## **BUILDING SUPPORT SYSTEMS:**

Maintenance and expansion of building support systems are needed to accommodate current functions in the Courthouse. If additional programmed spaces are needed, building systems need to be sized appropriately.

The Building Support Systems issues include, but are not limited to:

- Mechanical (HVAC) System
- Electrical System
- Plumbing (including toilet rooms) System
- Data and IT System
- Security System
- Transportation System (Parking, Loading, etc.)
- Prevention of Moisture Infiltration (Site Drainage and Building Envelope)

## **IMMEDIATE MAINTENANCE NEEDS:**

Immediate maintenance needs include Health and Life Safety improvements, as well as other repairs and renovations needed to provide for daily operations and Courthouse functions.

The immediate maintenance needs include, but are not limited to:

- See list under "Health and Life Safety"
- Prevention of further moisture infiltration through roofing, skylights, building envelope, site drainage, etc.
- Clean-up and renovations needed to remove damaged elements (drywall, insulation, ceiling tile, etc.) resulting from moisture infiltration or burst pipes.
- Repair and/or replace leaking pipes
- Repair and/or replace exterior sealant and stone building panels that could fall and injure people below
- Create clear code required egress paths in work areas, corridors, stairwell entrances and building exits.
- Repair and/or replace ADA accessible parking and sidewalks

Key repairs needed in the near term include, but are not limited to re-roofing, asphalt paving, re-grading problem site areas, replacement of panels and caulking of exterior walls, replacement of window glazing and doors, environmental remediation, accessibility improvements, life safety improvements and fire suppression system, as well as electrical, plumbing and mechanical upgrades.

## FUNCTIONAL DEFICIENCIES:

It is our understanding that the County is interested in the possibility of renovations to the building to improve functionality of current uses and perhaps to include additional courtroom uses. ERO Architects is currently helping the County with Facility Programming needs, requirements and functionality relationships and will address programming in a separate document. Our Assessment of the existing site and buildings includes the following concerns and recommendations about the functionality of the facilities:

- The **Annex Building** poses health concerns and ERO recommends that the functions currently housed in the building be relocated and that the Annex be demolished.
- The **Main Courthouse Building** is overcrowded and cannot support additional functions without major renovations and additions. In fact, it is our recommendation that the County re-evaluate existing functions housed in the building and relocate some functions to other locations as may be appropriate.
- The **Main Courthouse Building** is in need of major renovations to accommodate Code required improvements and possible added functional requirements, such as new courtrooms and support spaces.

To address the above functionality concerns, monies need to be spent in the following categories to improve existing facilities:

- Minimum Maintenance Improvements (minimum improvements can be thought of as those that will get you through the next 1-2 years)
- On-going Maintenance Improvements (improvements that can be made in phases to upgrade building support systems with approx. 5-10 year outlook)
- Major Maintenance Improvements (improvements that will extend the life of the building 20-30 years)
- Code Violation Upgrades and Additions
- Functionality Improvements and Additions
- Cosmetic improvements

Prior to significant monies being spent for improvements, it is ERO's recommendation that the County consider what **life expectancy** they desire to get from the existing facility. Is it 5 years, 10 years, 20-30 years, 50-60 years? It is possible to achieve long term function out of the existing facilities, but the existing building may not be able to house all of the County's **desired uses**. It is ERO's recommendation that the County also consider the **functional deficiencies** inherent to the existing main building even with future expansions or additions to it. For example, even if maintenance and life-safety improvements are completed in the existing building, the County would still have functional deficiencies that are very difficult to resolve, and satellite courtrooms would still be needed. Renovation and possible future expansion of the existing facilities are

dependant on functional requirements of the Programming needs for each department or courtroom. If the County renovates the existing facility, certain functional deficiencies remain. These functional deficiencies are as follow:

DISTRICT CLERK	
File Storage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 40,000 square feet of storage is offsite</li> <li>2. Inventory and archival nightmare</li> <li>3. Many lost files</li> <li>4. Requires drivers and vehicles for transportation of files</li> <li>5. Lost time and effort in transporting files</li> </ol>
Files Stored in the basement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Without an elevator, files must be carried up and down the stairs</li> <li>2. Basement floods during high rain incidences damaging files and/or evidence</li> <li>3. High risk for workers compensation claims</li> </ol>
Private Offices/Spaces	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Currently have only 4 private offices</li> <li>2. Requirement for at least 12 private offices to house department heads and District Clerk's immediate subordinate staff</li> <li>3. Small offices currently house multiple directors</li> <li>4. District Clerk's office doubles as a file storage space</li> <li>5. Housing office functions in the IDF and telephone rooms</li> <li>6. High risk for workers compensation claims</li> </ol>

DISTRICT CLERK (continued)	
Staff Open Area Workspace	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1,500 sf should accommodate no more than 25 staff</li> <li>Currently have over 55 staff in this area</li> <li>Worker efficiency is greatly reduced</li> <li>High risk for worker compensation claims</li> <li>Current staff projections indicate another 35 staff within 10 years</li> <li>No space available for growth</li> <li>This space should be at least 5,600 square feet</li> </ol>
Ancillary Facilities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack departmental staff restrooms</li> <li>Lack adequate break room facilities</li> <li>Lack conference area</li> </ol>

COUNTY CLERK	
File Storage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many files are stored off site</li> <li>Currently making approximately 4 delivery trips per day</li> <li>Requires drivers and vehicles for transportation of files</li> </ol>
Private Offices/Spaces	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Currently need 2 private offices</li> <li>Future growth may require 2 more offices</li> </ol>
Staff Open Area Workspace	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No space is available for growth</li> </ol>
Ancillary Facilities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack departmental restrooms</li> </ol>

COURTROOMS	
Courtrooms	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Not all courtrooms will be housed in the building- access to District Clerk and County Clerk at issue</li> <li>2. Lack public lobbies for staging public</li> <li>3. Public utilizes hallway for staging, creating ingress and egress issues for public safety</li> <li>4. Lack Attorney Consultation Rooms (2)</li> <li>5. Lack Witness Rooms (2)</li> <li>6. Lack Court Reporter Room</li> <li>7. Lack Bailiff Office</li> <li>8. Lack secured Prisoner access chase</li> <li>9. Lack Prisoner Holding Cell</li> <li>10. Lack Exhibit Storage Room</li> <li>11. Lack General Storage</li> <li>12. Lack sufficient Public Restrooms</li> </ol>
Jury	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Some courtrooms lack Jury Rooms</li> <li>2. Lack separate Jury restrooms</li> <li>3. Lack separate Jury access to courtroom</li> </ol>
Judges' Chambers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Some lack private restrooms</li> <li>2. Lack judge's storage</li> <li>3. Lack judge's secretary</li> <li>4. Lack judge's secretary storage</li> <li>5. Lack office for judge's clerk</li> </ol>

Sheriff's Department	
Security	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All courthouse functions should be subservient to security function</li> <li>2. Should only be one secured public entrance</li> <li>3. Lack space to add additional required metal detector and x-ray equipment</li> <li>4. Prisoner transportation to courtrooms is not secured</li> </ol>
General	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lack OIC office</li> <li>2. Lack monitoring room</li> <li>3. Lack locker room</li> <li>4. Lack departmental restrooms</li> <li>5. Lack break room</li> </ol>

GENERAL BUILDING	
Restrooms	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Existing restrooms are small for intensity of existing uses</li> <li>2. Difficulty in adding restrooms to serve areas Programmed to have separate toilet facilities</li> </ol>
Stairs/Elevators	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lack of accessibility to egress stairs for all occupants. Relocation of existing storage and workstations that inhibit egress must be factored into renovation plans.</li> <li>2. Lack of adequate stairwell(s) to accommodate adequate egress</li> <li>3. lack of adequate elevators for transporting prisoners</li> </ol>
Corridors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Several corridors need to be reconfigured and cleared to meet widths required by code. This can be accomplished, but will necessitate some storage and workspaces be relocated.</li> </ol>
Entrance / Lobby	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lack of space to accommodate security and open areas with seating</li> <li>2. Lack of lobbies and seat areas provided for Courts</li> </ol>

## ERO ARCHITECTS

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Below is a summary of the site inspections performed by various consultants. This summary is intended as a broad overview of the reports submitted by the consultants; refer to each individual consultant's report for details, recommendations and further information.

### **General Conditions**

The existing Courthouse site is approximately 4.74 acres located at 100 North Closser Blvd. Edinburg, Texas. The subject property consists of the Main building with two additions, one annex structure, sally port, landscaped areas and parking lots. The Courthouse was originally constructed in 1954 and subsequently remodeled with additions added in 1968 and 1978. The main Courthouse building contains approximately 93,088 square feet of floor area. The Annex is a single-story building containing approximately 8,000 square feet.

ERO Architects and our consultants conducted site visits and researched building, site and code issues. The City of Edinburg Building Code (2003 IBC) and Texas Accessibility Standards will apply to future renovations or additions to the complex.

### **Civil Engineering**

Hinojosa Engineering, Inc. performed a field investigation to observe the drainage conditions and has produced a topographic survey. Site drainage is of concern for the existing buildings and for future expansion of the complex. Though positive drainage patterns were found throughout the site, several low areas need to be filled in and graded to allow drainage away from the buildings. Sidewalks and parking lots are also in need of repair. See Hinojosa's report in Tab 6 for a detailed discussion of site issues and survey information.

### **Mold Assessment**

An assessment for mold was performed by Terracon of the walls, ceilings, floors and windows that were readily accessible during our site visits. Continuous moisture problems were seen and reported by staff and mold was found in the main building as well as the Annex. Visible mold growth was found on ceilings, behind artwork, in insulation, on mechanical piping, duct work, etc. Elevated mold concentrations in indoor environments occur when both moisture and food source are present. Indoor food sources for mold growth can include organic materials such as those resulting from flood or sewer back-up, or building materials containing cellulose such as carpet backing, drywall paper or ceiling panels. Moisture sources in buildings can occur as a result of leaks from water or sewer lines, moisture intrusion through roofs, windows, walls and foundations or as condensation in HVAC systems. For more detailed information, see Terracon's report in Tab 3.

We recommend that a special consultant be utilized at the time Hidalgo County moves forward with plans to renovate existing buildings, as part the Architectural and Engineering design team. Removal of associated building materials that are above the regulated quantities need to be accomplished by a trained and licensed mold contractor.

Areas of concern within the facility that fall below the regulated quantities by the State may be removed by a general contractor or maintenance personnel. However, we recommend that remediation be accomplished under the control of a trained and licensed mold contractor.

## **Asbestos**

During our site visits, we noticed that asbestos-containing materials were found in the buildings and are typical of buildings of this age. These asbestos-containing materials (ACM's) include joint compound, flooring, floor mastics, drywall texture, ceiling tiles, roof mastic, pipe insulation, and possibly other items not accessible for easy viewing during our site visit. One-hundred eighty-three (183) samples were taken and evaluated. Eighteen (18) were found to contain asbestos. For more detailed information, see Terracon's report in Tab 4.

It is our recommendation that all ACM's be removed from the buildings. We recommend that a special consultant be utilized at the time Hidalgo County moves forward with plans to renovate existing buildings, as part the Architectural and Engineering design team. A licensed professional's work should include identification of asbestos-containing material square footages and a proposal for preparation of abatement specifications, contractor pre-bid meeting, abatement contractor selection, consultation with Texas Department of State Health Services, baseline air samples, air monitoring services, and generation of the final air monitoring reports. Notification of the presence of the materials should also be made to employees and visitors so that they do not inadvertently disturb the remaining asbestos-containing materials.

## **Lead Paint**

During repair and/or renovation efforts, portions of the interior and exterior painted surfaces may require "significant abrasion" prior to modifying the building for reuse. With this in mind, forty-one (41) samples were taken and tested according to TELRR guidelines and the HUD standards for LBP, which is 0.5% by weight, or equivalent to 5,000 ppm. Twenty-eight (28) of these samples contain lead in concentrations below the detection limit fothe analysis performed and would be considered to present no hazard to the workforce. Eleven (11) samples analyzed contain lead in concentrations exceeding the detection limit byt less than 5,000 ppm for the analysis performed, and are therefore, considered a potential hazard by OSHA. Two (2) fo the paint samples were found to contain lead in concentrations greater than 5,000 ppm which would render the coatings s "Lead-Based Paint." For more detailed information, see Terracon's report in Tab 4.

We recommend that a special consultant be utilized at the time Hidalgo County moves forward with plans to renovate existing buildings, as part the Architectural and Engineering design team. Notification of the presence of lead paint should also be made to employees and visitors so that they do not inadvertently disturb the remaining lead-containing/lead-based paint materials.

## **Termites**

Terminix conducted a visible and accessible walk-through inspection of both the interior and exterior of the facilities. The courthouse structures do not appear to have been treated around the full perimeter of the building. In order for the County to properly preserve and maintain the structures, it is our recommendation that an Exterior Perimeter Liquid Defend System using Termidor SC treatment be used, along with a termite baiting system. The combined price for treatment is \$17,087.26, with an annual combined maintenance fee of \$2350.00. For more detailed information, see Terminix's report in Tab 7.

## **Key Repair Costs**

Key repair costs should be allocated to cover Maintenance Improvements, Code Violation Upgrades, Functionality Improvements and Cosmetic Improvements. A full breakdown of probable costs is provided in Tab 8 of this document. However, further investigation may uncover unknown items to be addressed.