



El Paso County Council of Judges
Enrique Moreno County Courthouse
500 E. San Antonio, Suite 101
El Paso, Texas 79901

December 11, 2023

Major Court Capital Project Requests

In response to the call for major project proposals, the Council of Judges submits this list of project proposals that could transform workspaces and technology, as well as provide amenities and improved citizen experience at the courthouse.

The Enrique Moreno Courthouse opened in 1991 on the site of the two previous courthouses. Three of the top eight floors were planned for expansion, and since that time all space in the courthouse has been utilized. The number of courts has grown, technology has become a dominant element in remote appearance, evidence presentation, case processing and records storage. Court operations and services have evolved and grown.

Some assumptions from the 1998 planning for the courthouse that did not come to pass are:¹

- Escalator service was planned from the basement up to the third floor. The purpose was to divert people from using the elevators.
- The service elevator would be used for moving juries.
- Developing need for and improved best practices in courthouse security.
- The foundation and superstructure were designed to accommodate two additional floors for the long-term future (thought to be 15-20 years).
- Originally four ground floor entrances were constructed along with the third-floor skyway. To allow for security checks, only the San Antonio entrance remains open on the 1st floor.
- When the courthouse was designed, there was no provision for broadband cabling or wifi routers.

Many courts now exceed the standard “judge + 3 staff” model on which chambers were designed. This is especially true of probate and specialty courts. Space is so constrained that County Court #5 is located in a smaller court footprint usually assigned to associate courts.

The aging of the courthouse is another matter of concern to the Judiciary. Courthouse security is difficult and costly to achieve. Systems failures such as internet issues, elevators and pipe leaks interrupt court business. Though the County through the Council of Judges Administration has invested funds to modernize courtrooms, notably to replace audio

¹ Design Development Documents, Garland & Hiles/Fischer Cordova Prestidge, April 18, 1988.

systems, standardize presentation systems and replace jury chairs, many courtrooms have worn rails, spotty internet and difficult doors. Furthermore, public areas show signs of wear.

Space planning for the entire County is certainly a difficult proposition. There's cost. There's land. Decisions to build or renovate. The Courts believe it is best to state our requirements and work with Commissioners and County Administration to create plans and projects that best serve the citizens and provide for the safety and productivity of our courts and county workforce.

Options the Judiciary would like considered include:

- **Priority request: Courthouse annex, particularly a therapeutic justice center.**
- Space reallocation/augmentation along with modernization of the current building to provide for court and public amenities.
- Select consolidation of services points and collaborative space.
- Construction of a new courthouse.
- New software applications to serve the courts and the justice system.

Options the Judiciary would have difficulty with:

- Hoteling workspaces for full-time court employees; regular telework is very difficult for courts, but hoteling may be an option for some specialty court staff.
- Courtroom sharing – courtroom space is already at a premium and courts already share courtrooms with visiting judges.

The Judiciary has documented specific immediate needs on the following pages. Four major capital projects are requested:

- I. Expansion/Space Reallocation for Courts (Exhibit 1)
- II. Courthouse Modernization (Exhibit 1)
- III. Courthouse Security (Exhibit 1)
- IV. Council of Judges Administration Space Reallocation (Exhibit 2)
- V. Court-connected software acquisitions (Exhibit 3)

The Judges believe that the first three projects will improve the operation of their courts and/or improve the experience of people visiting the courts. A therapeutic justice center is a central component of the Council's strategic goal to prioritize mental health in the justice system. Exhibit 2 provides details for the proposal to expand and reallocate space for the Council of Judges Administration and District Court Administration, while Exhibit 3 details proposed software applications to improve the functioning of the courts and the justice system at large.

Many of the courts would benefit from small configuration changes proposed in the past and encompassed in the three major proposals, and these court specific requests are listed in Exhibit 4.

The Council of Judges proposes the following capital projects and space allocations to benefit multiple courts, the bar, and the public. These projects are divided into 3 categories: I. Expansion/Space Allocation, II. Courthouse Modernization, and III. Courthouse Security.

I. Expansion/Space Allocation

Who benefits	Problem	Proposed Solution
Specialty Courts	Specialty courts rely on services that currently are provided offsite by partners. Further, specialty courts require additional staffing and, in some cases, have outgrown the traditional court design.	Create a therapeutic court annex separate from the courthouse. Collectively the specialty court programs are requesting offices for 26 current specialty court staff (not including judges), and privacy is a particular concern for participant interviews. Also recommended is space for community partners, some of whom might be able to rent space. Courtroom space should be included, along with the UA/drug screen facility below. Expansion of specialty court programs and staff is expected, including a planned request for a specialty court administrator in FY 2025.
Specialty Courts, CJC	Courthouse needs a dedicated UA/drug screen facility. Testing is conducted in public restrooms, not a best practice for several reasons.	Create a proper UA/drug screen location in the courthouse that can serve all specialty courts and CJC. Such a location should have donor privacy, a means for hand washing, a suitable clean surface inaccessible to the donor for the collector to work, secure, temporary storage and procedures designed to prevent unauthorized access and adulteration or substitution of the specimen. (SAMHSA)
Specialty Courts	Specialty Court programs require staff and meeting rooms beyond the traditional court.	Collectively the specialty court programs are requesting offices for 26 current specialty court staff (not including judges or core court staff), and privacy is a particular concern for participant interviews.
County Court 5	Currently housed in a “court master” space.	Provide full-size courtroom and chambers consistent with other courts headed by an elected judge.
Title IV-D Courts (383 rd)	Offices for the OAG are on the 11 th floor while the Title IV-D courts are on the sixth floor.	Co-locate the OAG offices with the Title IV-D courts.

II. Courthouse Modernization

Who benefits	Problem	Proposed Solution
Jurors, Court Visitors	Floor lobby furniture is old and stained, except for the hard marble benches. Attention should be paid to amenities since jurors, witnesses and court visitors often sit or hours outside courtrooms. Water fountains should be operational and allow bottle refills.	Consider updating or adding fixtures to provide for a more welcoming and comfortable atmosphere. Also consider a juror assembly area(s) within the courthouse as an alternative to holding jurors in the lobbies on the individual floors.

II. Courthouse Modernization, continued.

Who benefits	Problem	Proposed Solution
Everyone	Elevators slow, out of service	Provide funding for long-term solution to the elevator problem.
Everyone	Availability issues for applications, and broadband service in the courthouse.	Continue ITD's efforts to maximize availability and responsiveness of county applications such as Enterprise Justice. Continue to improve to improve wifi quality and speed throughout the courthouse.
Public, Attorneys	Participants and especially attorneys need a place to join virtual hearings when they are in the courthouse but called to virtual hearings. videoconferencing booths for attorneys and the public.	To continue to conduct both in-person and virtual business, attorneys and the public will need private booths to be able to conduct business. Focus on improving cubicles in the Law Library and increasing digital access.
Jurors, Courts	Securing Liberty Hall re: defendants.	There is no holding cell and security alarms or devices for the doors facing East First Avenue for when potentially violent defendants are in Liberty Hall for jury selection.
Public	Replace gallery seating in the Ceremonial Courtroom.	The gallery seating in the Ceremonial Courtroom is worn and not befitting this courtroom which is used for various ceremonies, trainings and jury selection.
Courts, Public	Older worn carpet, fix falling wallpaper.	Renovate to remove signs of age from the interior of the building.
Jurors	Lack of A/V equipment in jury rooms.	Install audio-visual equipment in jury rooms for juror review of digital evidence. Specially curb without internet access.
Courts	Lack of storage space.	Two courts have requested additional storage space.

II. Courthouse Security

Who benefits	Problem	Proposed Solution
All courthouse employees and users	Entrance security from Courthouse Security Committee Report, 2019.	Reconfigure entrances to improve security: provide site lines, bullet proof glass barriers, and add a new monitoring/rapid response room.
All courthouse employees and users	Surveillance, from the Courthouse Security Committee Report, 2019.	Complete and integrate closed circuit camera system to include those needed by courts.
Court clerks	Security glass, from the Courthouse Security Committee Report, 2019.	Provide security glass protection at court clerk front desks. Clerks are often the point of contact for visitors and need a barrier against aggressive behavior.
Judges	Planned garage parking for judges isn't sufficient, needs sufficient handicapped spots, and turns from ally are difficult.	Consider larger renovation of the parking garage(s).

Council of Judges Administration

Council of Judges Administration has used the same unrenovated first floor office for many years. In that time the responsibilities of the office have changed, staff has been spread across the courthouse due to space limitations, and additional staff have been integrated wherever space can be had. Furthermore, the introduction of remote hearings has made remote interpreting and court reporting difficult or even impossible in our open office spaces.

Now, in 2023, the COJA has work areas that are substandard given job responsibilities, and average less than 40% of the minimum recommended office area according to the County of El Paso Space Planning Guidelines. The Council of Judges endorses this proposal by Council of Judges Administration.

Issue	Headcount affected	Proposed Solution
Consolidation: Staff are spread out in multiple locations throughout the courthouse, Liberty Hall, and the downtown jail. Secure, contiguous space is preferred for COJ staff in the courthouse.	32 FTE P/T staff	Consolidate staff in contiguous space, with offices and cubicles appropriate to their work. Reference the County of El Paso Space Planning Guidelines, Aug. 2022. Provide a true reception area for main office, with access controls.
Adequate Space: Current workspaces are too small or too noisy to perform assigned tasks.	32 FTE	Allocate sufficient space and furniture to accommodate current and future staffing under the County of El Paso Space Planning Guidelines.
Special Consideration: Appropriate space for temporary bailiffs	0-3 per day	Temporary bailiffs only have a single cubicle in an open office. Some means, for instance a locker area, should be available to secure personal items. Furthermore, the one cubicle used by temporary bailiffs is located in a “quiet room” used by interpreters for Zoom hearings.
Special Consideration: Court interpreters and court reporters need offices to be able to conduct interpretations without interference.	8.5 FTE + contractors	Provide sound-proofed offices commensurate with the position.
Expanded Service: COJ serves as a hub for deliveries and storage for the courts. New A/V and computer hardware is stored for installation and as backup equipment.	--	Adequate, secure storage and receiving area is needed to maintain inventory and accept deliveries. It is anticipated that this need will grow as more law enforcement equipment flows through COJA to the court bailiffs.
Office space for District Court Administration	9 FTE	Like COJA, District Court Administration is scattered in multiple locations. Consolidate offices with COJA where possible.

Recommended Major Software Applications Acquisitions

The Justice System, and in particular the courts, are more and more dependent on software applications for documentation and data connected to our cases. Furthermore, automation offers opportunities for quality and efficiency gains.

Specialty Court Case Management. Specialty Courts need to track and report data that is different from the usual criminal court. Proposals for augmenting an existing contract were reviewed by the Specialty Courts Committee, which has already voted to recommend that the Specialty Courts all agree to request that COJA pursue funding, acquisition, and implementation for this software.

iJuror upgrade. El Paso County has been dependent on a legacy juror management system for many years, mainly because it has been highly customized to our needs. Vendor jury management systems have improved greatly in recent years, and it is time for the County to acquire a new system that provides better data, more convenient services to jurors, and more automated processing for jury management. Demonstrations have already been scheduled as a precursor to a procurement.

Automating court document and process flow. This item is more a recommendation than a request. Increased automation offers opportunities to improve both quality and efficiency in document management and process flow, for the County as well as the Courts. One example is Tarrant County, whose court clerk's office won a NACo award in 2022 for their project Using Artificial Intelligence to perform intelligent document processing for Civil Court Records. Tarrant County's court clerk announced in a recent presentation that the project cost of \$650,000 in her office resulted in projected annual savings of \$1.9 million, with processing times reduced as much as 80 percent. Her project also resulted in the ability to allow employees flex time, even while she estimated that the automation took the place of 1 out of every 5 employees involved in reviewing and approving filed documents. The Courts themselves are already looking forward to new opportunities for automation in the update to Enterprise Justice 2023 and seeks more avenues to serve the public better through automation.

PROJECT REQUESTS FROM INDIVIDUAL COURTS	
4th Floor	
Criminal District Court #1	Witness Room – This request has been pending since 2018. Submitted for FY24 CIP Request – Pending
6th Floor	
120th District Court	ZOOM Room FY24 CIP Request for Kitchen- Pending .
171st District Court	One room, at least 8x8 ft to store my Food Bank. Two attorney conference rooms to be utilized during trial. Office space where the court reporter office is located.
7th Floor	
County Criminal Court #2	The current setting is not conducive to appropriately supervise participants pursuant to the practice established for specialty courts. We do not want to be sued in Federal Court for HIPAA and 42 CFR violations and Constitutional issues. The program is now statutory, which requires it to be conducted pursuant to the mission it was established for. This is a treatment court and confidentiality is paramount and needs to be protected. The program has been in existence for 19 years. Requested solution: Offices for 8 DWI Court personnel, with privacy for interviews Male and female testing office. Currently testing in the public restrooms. HIPAA violations because of privacy and ethical concerns for participants and the public.
346th District Court	2 offices 1- for probation officer 1- for bailiff. Need storage space. Need witness rooms for trial.
346TH Veterans Court	Need office space for specialty court staff 10 total – need a private office for interviews with participants.
205th Wellness Court	Request submitted for space – need space for 6 staff – 2 offices will need soundproof room for interviews with participants.
9th Floor	
243rd Mental Health Court	2 Offices total – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health program coordinator • Probation officer • Soundproof one office for interviews with participants.
10th Floor	
210th District Court	FY2024 CIP- Budget request- Pending . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space in Judges Chambers • Upgrade Kitchen-

11th Floor

383rd District Court	One office for the OAG staff on the 6 th floor not 12 th . FY2024 CIP Budget Request - Pending <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Upgrade courtroom furniture (old, water damaged, etc.)"• Upgrade A/V system in courtroom.• Update kitchen in the DC.• Update copier/fax/scanner in
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12th Floor

Probate Court #1	Replace or reupholster gallery chairs in the Ceremonial Courtroom.
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