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Courthouse renovation costs up in latest report

Architects now favor concept of turning entrance toward Pine Street for government circle with city

By Tracy Overstreet

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Architects refining two possible building additions to the Hall County Courthouse said they actually changed their mind about which of the plans has the strongest features once they incorporated the concept of creating a government circle and turning the courthouse entrance toward Pine Street.

Architect Michael LeBoeuf of Dewberry Architects in Florida told Hall County supervisors during a video conference call Tuesday that architects in his firm preferred the B-3 option that would add a two-story addition in the former Public Safety Center parking lot

“We like B-1. It’s a pretty strong scheme. It makes the best civic statement.”

Michael LeBoeuf
 Dewberry Architects, on the options for an addition to the Hall County Courthouse

adds directly onto the east side of the historic Hall County Courthouse.

“We like B-1. It’s a pretty strong scheme,” LeBoeuf told the supervisors. “It makes the best civic statement.”

B-1 makes a “cohesive statement” with Grand

Island City Hall because the government circle concept replicates the city’s curved driveway in the form of a curved walkway in front of the new courthouse entrance, he told the county board.

B-1 also allows for a secure, covered parking space for judges by making use of the natural slope on the east side of the courthouse and allows for an adjacent handicapped parking lot and drop-off zone immediately in front of the new entrance, LeBoeuf said.

A new public parking lot could be created on the east side of Pine Street if the former Health Department building at the corner of Pine and First streets is demolished, he said.

Dewberry architects, along with Grand Island architectural firm Cannon Moss Brygger, were hired by the county to determine how to create space for three district courtrooms, three county courtrooms, a juvenile court space, a hearing room, plus associated offices for judicial staff.

The 1904 courthouse currently has two full-size district courtrooms, one makeshift district court hearing room and two small-sized county courtrooms.

B-3, the addition to the south of the courthouse, also uses the government circle concept, but it is farther away from other government buildings and therefore loses some of the impact, LeBoeuf said.

There also was some concern about how close the B-3 addition would be to Locust Street, said Brad Kissler of Cannon Moss Brygger. The building would be just 6 feet from the sidewalk.

That proximity to the street would give the courthouse addition a very “urban” feel, LeBoeuf said, but it also poses potential security risks, such as with a vehicle with explosives left at curbside that could damage the building, he said.

Architects had pegged the cost of the additions somewhere between \$12.5 million and \$14 million about a month ago, but their estimates have increased.

The cost estimate for B-1 is \$14.8 million to \$16.8 million, LeBoeuf said.

The cost estimate for B-3 is \$14.3 million to \$16.3 million.

Each would provide a two-story addition with a basement for a total of about 37,000 square feet of new space and each would require demolition of the current Health and Human Services building and the old portion of the former Hall County Jail.

As a cost comparison, the architects also calculated the cost of building a new courthouse near the new Hall County Jail and Law Enforcement Center, at 110 and 111 Public Safety Drive.

That new construction estimate was \$21 million to \$24.2 million.

The cost of new construction was less per square foot, but more square footage was needed to replace the existing historic courthouse space, LeBoeuf said.

Supervisors asked questions about expansion space in the next 40 to 50 years, the amount of detailing on the exterior of the additions, whether the additions would address concerns from the Nebraska State Historical Society to maintain the historic architecture of the courthouse, and whether floor plans could be altered if judges wanted to make changes.

Hall County board Chairman Bob McFarland said not only is input from the judges important to the process, but so is input from the general

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public.

Two public meetings at Grand Island City Hall have tentatively been scheduled on Tuesday nights on May 20 and June 3 to get reaction from taxpayers, McFarland said.

For the record:

In other action Tuesday, the county board:

- Heard concerns from Public Works Director Casey Sherlock, who also oversees the county's Geographic Information System Department, that Register of Deeds Mitch Clark has stated that the department's "online mapping is very messed up." Sherlock said there were past problems with the mapping that occurred when Clark

worked in the GIS Department from November 2008 to December 2010. Sherlock said current staff has been working the past two years to correct all those past errors that he attributed to "Clark's incompetence in understanding property ownership." Clark was not present at the meeting, but said he has offered to help fix the errors, but the county "refuses to admit the mapping is wrong" and is "being overseen by people who have absolutely no knowledge or training in GIS."

- Ratified the purchase of a water detention cell in the Schroeder Subdivision for \$1.

- Approved a \$429,095 paving contract with JIL

Asphalt.

- Approved a \$40,956 grant for the Central Nebraska Drug and Safe Streets Task Force.

- Approved a \$26,312 grant for the 2014 Byrne Justice Assistance Grant, of which the county will receive \$6,578 of the funding.

- Received the Merit Commission recommendations on wage raises ranging from 12 percent to 20 percent for Hall County Sheriff's deputies, sergeants, and captains.

- Set public hearings on June 3 at 10 a.m. to renew a conditional use permit for a Mid-Nebraska Aggregates sand and gravel operation on Highway 11 and to hold hear-

ings at 10:15 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. for Verizon Wireless.



Courtesy Dewberry Architects

These renderings show two possible additions to the Hall County Courthouse. Option B-1 (left) is an addition directly on the east side of the courthouse. Option B-3 (right) would add a two-story addition in the former Public Safety Center parking lot along Locust Street. Incorporating the idea of a "government circle" has led architects to prefer B-1 because it makes a "cohesive statement" with Grand Island City Hall across the street, replicating city hall's curved driveway in the form of a curved walkway.