



# Hall County Courthouse

## Public discourse to continue today

By Tracy Overstreet

tracy.overstreet@theindependent.com

Hall County Board of Supervisors Chairman Bob McFarland, the chairman of the county's facilities committee, will conduct another public hearing to present two options the county is considering regarding additions to the Hall County Courthouse.

The public meeting will be at 6 p.m. Tuesday in the community meeting room in the basement of Grand Island City Hall, 100 E. First.

"From Day 1, I've favored (option) B-1," McFarland said. "It seems to be the most logical decision."

Option B-1 features a two-story addition with basement on the east side of the courthouse, five new courtrooms and secured, covered parking for judges. The existing courthouse would be remodeled to add a third district courtroom and a hearing room. The cost is estimated to be between \$14.8 million to \$16.8 million.

Option B-3 features a two-story addition on the south



**Bob  
McFarland**

side of the courthouse with five courtrooms, 20 easy-access public parking spaces and a secure outdoor parking lot for judges. Remodeling in the existing courthouse would add the third district courtroom and hearing room. The cost is estimated to be between \$14.3 million to \$16.3 million.

But at a public meeting on May 20, some members of the public suggested the county look more seriously at building a completely new court facility on land the county owns at 110 Public Safety Drive, where the jail is located.

Some county supervisors had inquired about new construction, too, which architects pegged to cost between \$21 million to \$24.2 million.

Those suggestions about new construction at a different location have raised concerns from the Hall County Historical Society and the Hall County Bar Association, both of which were encouraging their members to attend Tuesday's meeting.

Grand Island attorney Daniel Placzek sent an email to local bar association members, which was forwarded to Hall County Historical Society members, stating that for several reasons he personally doesn't want a new

### IF YOU GO

#### Hall County Courthouse options meeting

**When:** 6 p.m. Tuesday

**Where:** Community meeting room, lower level of City Hall, 100 E. First

courthouse building constructed. Many costly exterior repairs have already been made to the existing courthouse, and interior renovations in district courtrooms were done as well.

New construction would cost taxpayers more than the two options for additions, which he called "well thought out" and meeting the county's current and future judicial needs.

"The existing courthouse is beautiful," Placzek said in his email.

The 1904 beaux arts courthouse was designed by Omaha architect Thomas Rogers Kimball and is one of the few examples of that style in Nebraska.

Placzek said the courthouse is also part of a "government circle" downtown that includes City Hall and the Hall County Administration Building.

"I have enjoyed the convenience of walking to the courthouse for almost 34 years," Placzek said. "Much of the legal community in Grand Island is located near the courthouse, in downtown Grand Island."

Placzek said the courthouse is a "cornerstone of downtown Grand Island."

"We have recently seen renewed interest in the development of Grand Island's downtown area," Placzek said. "Relocating the courthouse will damage that momentum and, in fact, begin a slow exodus of the legal community from the downtown area."

McFarland said that, once he explains to taxpayers the difference in cost from building a 37,000-square-foot addition onto the existing courthouse and the cost of building an entirely new courthouse, most agree that the addition is the best way to go.

A video presentation from Dewberry Architects of Florida will open the public meeting to explain the courthouse needs, layout and options.

The meeting will then be open to questions and comments from the audience that will be addressed by county supervisors and local architect Brad Kissler of Cannon Moss Brygger Architects.