



TO: BOARD OF DIRECTORS
FROM: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
SUBJECT: SAN ANTONIO FEDERAL COURTHOUSE PROJECT
STATUS: ADOPTED

DATE: 11/23/2010

RECOMMENDATION: That the Board of Directors of The Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce adopt the following position statement as policy.

STATEMENT: The Chamber supports the appropriation of \$108 -125 million in funds to build a new San Antonio Federal Courthouse on the land currently occupied by the City of San Antonio Police Department.

Furthermore, The Chamber believes it is critical to maintain the original nine courtrooms that were identified for this courthouse, as opposed to the less desirable option of moving forward with the current proposal to build seven courtrooms.

The current courthouse lacks critical safety measures that place both judges and court personnel in the same hallways and elevators with prisoners who are being sentenced in court. The City has also already begun demolition on the site for the new Police Headquarters building in a good faith effort to begin the construction process that will make land available for the courthouse.

BACKGROUND: The City of San Antonio has signed a memorandum of understanding with the General Services Administration (GSA) wherein the City and GSA will exchange the John H. Wood Building and the adjacent Spears Training Center for the land currently occupied by the City of San Antonio Police Department. The City Council and GSA Commissioner have both ratified this land swap agreement. San Antonio's courthouse project is currently number one on the list of federal courthouse projects that could receive funding.

The agreed value of the Wood/Spears property is \$9 million. The agreed value of the San Antonio Police Department property is \$12.447 million. GSA will pay the City the difference in these values. The signing of this memorandum of understanding completes a seven-year process of acquiring a site for this project.

The San Antonio Federal Courthouse is currently housed in the former U.S. Pavilion that was constructed for the 1968 world fair, known as "HemisFair". The pavilion was renovated in 1975 to house two district judges, a part-time magistrate, the clerk's office and other federal agencies. The number of federal employees has long since outgrown the space provided in the pavilion. There are currently seven judges working in the pavilion and a majority of employees are actually located in the adjacent Federal Building.

The pavilion building was originally designed to be a theater, and thus it lacks many important security features such as a sallyport, adequate detention space and no secured elevators or corridors. Under the revised Design Guide standards, the Marshal's office requires 41% more space to safely conduct its business. Judges, staff and jurors very often encounter criminal defendants in the corridors because of these serious security lapses. Deputy Marshals and visiting county deputies are required to escort prisoners in a non-secure and open parking lot. In addition, the building is functionally obsolete and has been affected by environmental and water quality issues. Finally, many of the interior spaces, including courtrooms, are not ADA compliant.

Assuming that construction funds are approved by Congress, the closing date for the SAPD property will be on or about November 30, 2012. The closing date for the Wood/Spears property would be two weeks following the completion and move-in into the new U.S. Courthouse (estimated date December 2015).

The project has recently been "downsized" from nine courtrooms to seven courtrooms due to the fact that some members of Congress have been concerned that previous courthouse projects have been overbuilt. San Antonio constituents have supported the request for nine courtrooms due the fact that the City is headquarters to the Western District of Texas, the second busiest court in the country on a weighted per judge basis. There exists an option to build the courthouse with the square footage necessary to house nine courtrooms while only building seven with the current appropriated funding. This would allow for an additional two courtrooms to be built out in the future when needed but would prevent the increased costs of building two completely new courtroom spaces in the future.

REASONS FOR SUPPORT:

- The development of a new courthouse provides an appropriately designed and secured building for the Court, employees and deputy marshals.
- With the relocation of the courthouse, the City reclaims HemisFair Park and has the opportunity to implement residential and commercial development of that property.
- The relocation of the Federal Courthouse to the west side of San Antonio provides an opportunity to stimulate economic development in that area.

REASONS FOR OPPOSITION:

- Additional spending on federal projects will further increase the federal deficit.

IMPLEMENTATION: The Chamber will communicate its support for the new Federal Courthouse Project to the City of San Antonio, Bexar County, our Bexar County congressional delegation and both United States Senators as well as the media and Chamber membership through our Chamber newsletter and other distribution channels.