

**Question:** Can the court continue to operate within its current building configuration utilizing a shared system of circulation for judicial staff, in-custody defendants, and members of the public?

**Answer:** No, separate zones of circulation are required for safe operation of general jurisdiction courts.

**Background:** In recent years there has been a rapid rise in the number of violent acts within courthouses nationwide. These acts range from minor disturbances and physical assaults to senseless acts of murder and mass destruction. Security risks within courthouses are perhaps more visceral than in other environments because of the close proximity of disputing parties (e.g. revenge seeking family members in family court or rival gang members populating the gallery in criminal court).<sup>1</sup> In Polk County the security risks are greatly heightened by the current building configuration in which all visitors, detainees and judicial staff share an open circulation system.

Courthouses should be safe environments where the public can come to resolve their legal matters. Courthouses that are perceived as unsafe jeopardize the integrity of the entire legal system. Although the historic courthouse was built according to the most current design and court planning strategies of its time, the County has since grown tremendously in size and the facility requirements for safe operation of the court have changed considerably as courthouse planners have come to the realization that separate zones of circulation are required for safe operation of general jurisdiction courthouses.<sup>2</sup>

Today, the Polk County Court is operating in an environment that was designed for security needs that have changed dramatically in the last 100 years and is at very high risk for a major catastrophe. The Polk County Courthouse is an overwhelmed facility that regularly accommodates 2,000 visitors per day. Within the shared central atrium there is no physical separation between members of the public, in-custody adult detainees, in-custody juvenile detainees, and judicial staff members. It is imperative that immediate action be taken to relieve the stress that is currently being placed on the historic building.

To the fullest extent possible and within the confines of the original architecture, separate circulation systems should be provided for the public, judges, court employees, and detainees in the building to maintain proper security. Although there are limits to the extent to which the historic building can be reconfigured, the following principles should guide efforts for any remodeling in regards to security and separation of circulation:

### **Public Circulation System**

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, Tony (2003). *Court Security, A Guide for Post 9-11 Environments*. Charles C Thomas Publishers LTD.

<sup>2</sup> Hardenbergh, Don with Michael Griebel, Robert W. Tobin, and Chang-Ming Yeh (1998). *The Courthouse: A Planning and Design Guide for Court Facilities*. The National Center for State Courts.

The public circulation system should provide access from the public point of entry to the controlled access points of restricted and secure areas of the courthouse. Spaces that should be accessed from the public circulation zone include waiting areas, courtrooms, public counter areas, jury assembly rooms, mediation rooms, attorney/client conference rooms, office reception rooms, vending areas, and public restrooms.

### **Restricted Circulation System**

Judges and court employees should be able to move into work areas or courtrooms through private corridors and private elevators without going through the public area. The restricted circulation system should not be bisected by the public circulation system.<sup>3</sup> Building service functions, including storage, staging and loading areas, security staff offices, and other support areas, should be located within the restricted circulation zone. The restricted circulation system can include connecting stairs between staff areas on other floors.

### **Secured Circulation System**

Prisoner movement in the courthouse should be segregated and not intersect with other court users. The secured circulation system should provide access between a secured in-custody entrance<sup>4</sup>, holding areas adjacent to the courtrooms, and inside the courtrooms. The design of these areas shall prohibit unauthorized access by the public and escape by persons in custody. Secured circulation corridors, elevators, and stairwells should minimize turns, alcoves, and other potential hiding places; secure circulation areas should be monitored with video cameras supervised by the court security staff.

**Advice:** The security risks involved in maintaining the current facility in its current configuration are grave and it is imperative that steps be taken to improve the current configuration. At the same time, the extensive renovations required to fully address the problem will be substantial and have the potential to negatively impact the building's physical character and the ability of the court to operate while the building remodeling is underway. It is extremely important that renovations be planned in way that is sensitive to the original architecture of the historic building and that allows the court to operate in the interim period. Although renovations will be costly and will require substantial coordination with other facility utilization efforts<sup>5</sup>, it is highly recommended that County and Court leadership prioritize a long-term plan to provide separate zones of circulation for the safe operation of the Court.

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<sup>3</sup> The Historic Courthouse has substantial limitations in regards to the feasibility of complete separation of judicial and public traffic because of the central atrium area that bisects the building along its North/South axis. However, pre-schematic concept schemes prepared by SVPA Architects have illustrated that marked improvements the building's circulation system can be accomplished in this regard.

<sup>4</sup> Detainee transportation and staging for the Courthouse is currently accommodated through the old jail building which provides a safe and effective means for prisoner transportation and holding. After initial intake and processing at the Old Main Jail, detainees are transported to the Courthouse via a secure underground tunnel. However, once inside the historic courthouse there is no secure means for transfer of detainees to individual courtrooms.

<sup>5</sup> The ability of the court to remove a substantial amount of functions out of the historic courthouse in order to accommodate extensive remodeling is dependent on the availability of alternative facilities. Refer to the facilities utilization briefs for descriptions of the alternate facilities considered for this report.