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May 21, 2012

Honorable Michael G. Bagneris  
Judge, Division "H"  
Civil District Court for the Parish of Orleans  
421 Loyola Ave., Room 304  
New Orleans, LA 70112

**Re: Site Analysis and Renovation Feasibility Assessment of Charity Hospital Complex  
for Civil District Court**

Dear Judge Bagneris:

Thank you for requesting the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) to assess the renovation feasibility of the Charity Hospital Repurposing Plan (referred to as the Plan). The NCSC consultant attended a briefing session with the representatives of the Court at the City Hall in late March, 2012. The architects who prepared the Plan gave a preliminary discussion on the planning concept and answered several questions raised by the judges. Subsequent to the meeting, the NCSC consultant attended the en bench judges' meeting in April 26<sup>th</sup> to present the review findings on the Plan.

The proposed hospital structure has 902,640 gross square feet of floor space. According to the Plan, the City Hall and the Civil District Court would be the two proposed tenants of the renovated Charity Hospital complex, occupying 59% of the floor space. The court would be located on the second through the sixth floors. The NCSC consultant understands that the unveiled Plan is preliminary and many of its details are yet to be developed. The courtesy review conducted by the NCSC was to examine whether the major physical attributes of the Plan could satisfy fundamental court operational requirements and meet the latest courthouse space standards. The following summarizes major planning concerns discovered in the review of the Plan.

1. The floor plans lack a large enough space to accommodate clustered court functional spaces with proper adjacency and circulations. The constraining building structures, in terms of the narrow column spans and the low floor heights, are inadequate for courtroom construction. The multi-story building features three discreet wings connected by a

service concourse, where the vertical building service cores are located. It is noticed that the proposed Plan would locate courtrooms in the central wing; as it has two, wider structure bays of approximately 30' each on the sides and an 18' center bay. The two side wings have narrower structure spans between columns of 22', 10' and 22' respectively. The standard, rectangular 1,700 square feet jury trial courtroom measures 34' width by 50' depth. The narrow widths of the building wings and the restrictive column grids prohibit the design of courtroom/chamber sets meeting latest design standards and provide separate circulation for public, employee, jurors, and in-custody.

2. Renovation design typically will be less efficient than that of a new building, because the renovation project has to compromise with the existing infrastructure and inefficient floor layout. In addition to the functional difficulties to accommodate the courtroom set in the wings, the Plan is based on the program for a new courthouse and may not be adequate in the renovated facility.
3. The narrow structural confines make it impossible to develop column-free interior courtroom spaces. The placement of courtrooms in any of the three building wings would result in two large columns in each courtroom, which violates the non-obtrusive sightline security requirement. The argument for removal of columns with a replaced transfer beam solution in the courtroom is structurally challenging and cost prohibitive, especially in a high rise building. The transfer beam introduced to the structure will reduce the already low ceiling height (about 8') and becomes detrimental to the use of courtroom.
4. With the exception of the first floor lobby entry, the typical floor to floor height of the Charity Hospital is 12' with the finished ceiling height at 8'-0". The building floor height is significantly less than the recommended 12' finished ceiling height for standard trial courtroom construction (see NCSC Courthouse Design Guide and California Trial Court Facility Standards). New courthouses built with a 12' courtroom finished ceiling usually would require a 16'~17' floor to floor height. The existing low ceiling restriction in the courtroom is detrimental to the design of the elevated judge's bench, in the case where a 6' tall judge standing on a 1.5' elevated platform at the judge's bench can almost touch the ceiling with the top of his head.
5. The existing building infrastructure requires a complete overhaul to modernize the facility. The building's environmental system is antiquated and a new central air conditioning system is required. The building foundation requires comprehensive reinforcement to mediate unbalanced building settlements. Renovation of the building would also include replacement of the roof, replacing the inefficient single glaze windows, any hazardous material remediation, and restoration of the building exterior. The cost of renovation of the Charity Hospital could be higher than new construction.
6. The collocation of the Court with City Hall and the lack of a separate and independent courthouse entrance on the first floor of the complex may diminish the image of an independent judiciary. The coordination of facility management and building security could be complicated by the incompatible operational environments between the executive and the judicial branches of governments.

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The NCSC concludes that the Charity Hospital building's floor plates and the structure layout are not suitable for efficient court operations. The Repurposing Plan may not be able to provide the spatial organization and separate circulation required in a modern courthouse. The feasibility and cost effectiveness of structural enhancement and modification to remedy the aged and functionally disconcerted Charity Hospital infrastructure for Court use should be further investigated before implementation.

Thank you for your assistance to the assessment efforts. I am attaching a copy of my presentation in the judges' meeting for you. Please call, if there are questions. I can be reached at 303-308-4302 or by e-mail [cmveh@ncsc.org](mailto:cmveh@ncsc.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chang-Ming Yeh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Chang-Ming" and the last name "Yeh" clearly distinguishable.

Chang-Ming Yeh  
Principal Court Facility Planner

Attachment: Charity Hospital Renovation & Utilization Feasibility