

August 24, 2023

This memorandum summarizes the status of the renovation of the historic Tomochichi United States Courthouse in downtown Savannah, Georgia. The memo reviews the important aims of the project, the entities involved in the renovation, and recent events which have caused a funding shortfall and threaten to derail this critical undertaking.

The Tomochichi Courthouse sits on Wright Square, in the middle of Savannah's renowned Historic Landmark District. Originally built in 1899, this beautiful courthouse has admirably served the community for 123 years. However, it has glaring security, structural, and operational deficiencies and has been designated as one of the least safe federal courthouses in the country. These deficiencies are being addressed through an ongoing wholesale renovation and modernization. The project's aims include providing disabled public access to the building, constructing secure corridors for judicial officers and detainees, replacing outdated and inefficient mechanical and electrical systems, repairing structural deficiencies in the iconic courthouse tower, and restoring and preserving significant historical elements of the building.

The General Services Administration ("GSA") is overseeing the project. However, the United States District Court for the Southern District of Georgia and the United States Marshal Service are also keenly interested in the project as they have operated in the building since its inception and will exclusively occupy the building following the renovation. Moreover, given the building's location, its historical and cultural status, and the effect the work has had on the traffic and business in and around the courthouse, the greater Savannah community has taken a keen and often vocal interest in this project.

The design of the renovation was completed by Liollo Architecture of Charleston, South Carolina and Hartman-Cox Architects of Washington, DC. The construction team, Brasfield & Gorrie of Birmingham, Alabama began the construction phase in earnest on August 16, 2021. While there were some early delays, Brasfield & Gorrie was making good progress until two structural problems during this calendar year.

On February 1, 2023, the building monitoring system recorded a 2-millimeter shift in the 1930's portion of the building which resulted in the evacuation of the workers and the surrounding downtown businesses. The streets and businesses were reopened on February 3rd once the stabilization efforts were completed. This first event ending up having minimal impact on the project's schedule but certainly caused consternation among the downtown Savannah community.

On April 11, 2023, a portion of the third floor in the 1890's section of the Courthouse collapsed. This was a significant structural event that resulted in multiple workers being injured, one suffering substantial injuries. Thankfully, the Savannah Fire Department evacuated the building and minimized the damage to those in and around the worksite. Particularly given the prior event, this collapse caused a significant amount of concern among the downtown community. The City of Savannah worked extensively to ensure that the local community was safe and informed.

After the April 11 floor collapse, all construction work on the building was halted. Recent efforts have been focused on removing any hazardous materials that were disturbed by the collapse, attempting to remove debris within the area of the collapse, making the building safe for a full return to work, and identifying any other areas of structural concern. The work to recover from the collapse is forecasted to take until the end of September 2023. Then, once the building is cleared for more extensive construction activities, the construction team will implement a phased return to work over the ensuing months with work first occurring outside the area of collapse. Thus, this event has led to continuing delays and additional work which have both drastically affected the project's schedule and budget.

From a scheduling perspective, GSA is now forecasting that substantial completion should be realized by December 2025 – barring any further unforeseen complications – with the building being open to the public in the Fall of 2026.

From a budgeting perspective, this project has already undergone multiple rounds of extensive value engineering with several portions of the original plan redesigned or removed all together to save costs. There simply are no more aspects of the project to cut. The original prospectus level monies, which totaled approximately \$70 million, have been obligated or committed, and the project is 30% complete. Additionally, the project's contingency funds were dedicated to the various clean up and recovery efforts necessitated by the floor collapse, leaving the project with little available monies to move forward. However, GSA has committed to finding the money to finish the project.

To that end, GSA recently identified funds from two other projects, totaling \$18.1 million, that could be reprogrammed to the Tomochichi project. While these funds are not enough to make up the entirety of the funding gap, they would keep the project moving forward and their reprogramming is critical. The Administrative Office of the United States Courts expects that GSA will send the reprogramming package to Congress for approval in September 2023. Unfortunately, at least an additional \$25 million is needed in a timely manner to ensure the project's completion. While GSA has committed to remedying this significant shortfall, it does not appear that the agency has identified a source for this funding.

Everyone involved in and affected by the Tomochichi project realizes this is a necessary and important project. This is an iconic building that serves a vital need, and it cannot be abandoned mid-project. Thus, it is incumbent upon everyone involved to ensure that the endeavor is fully supported financially so that it can continue to serve the greater Savannah community for years to come.