

**SCOTTS BLUFF
COUNTY
COURTHOUSE
GERING
NEBRASKA**

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**ARCHITECTURAL PLANNING CONSULTATION
DECEMBER 1972**

SCOTTS BLUFF COUNTY COURTHOUSE - NEBRASKA

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1. CONSULTANT TERMS OF REFERENCE

George E. Kostritsky, AIA, AIP and Michael A. Bignell, AIA, ARIBA, AAIP, were retained for this architectural and planning consultation by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) under the Criminal Courts Technical Assistance Project, administered by the American University Law School. The terms of reference that directed and guided this consultation were to provide architectural and planning assistance to the Scotts Bluff County Court and Administration and to advise on the following principal problems confronting the County Court and Board of Commissioners:

- * Recently enacted legislation establishing a statewide system of County Courts has created the need for additional Courtrooms with related jury and support facilities.
- The existing Court House building is approximately fifty (50) years old and houses some County Office functions as well as the County Seat for local government.
- Centralizing the Court function and growth in the Court related facilities, as well as growth in the County office functions, has created overcrowded conditions and inefficiently used space in the existing County Court House building.
- A recently constructed County Jail facility exists, adjacent to the existing Court House. This Jail facility is directly connected by a security bridge to the Court House and is considered a major determinant in retaining the present location for the County and District Courts.

* Legislative Bill 1032 - Legislature of Nebraska

Thus, this architectural and planning consultation was directed primarily at the problems of growth and change occurring in the County-District Court and County Office functions housed in the present Court House together with an appraisal of the existing physical facilities owned and used by the County of Scotts Bluff.

The existing Jail facility and the changing County Court system have important regional implications throughout the County in terms of the operation and management of the Judicial and Police functions. Similarly, the physical size and growth requirements of these functions are related to their regional nature. At the conclusion of this report, a series of recommendations are made for further action resulting from this study. It should be emphasized that the regional role of these facilities will largely determine the future growth and development requirements of the County facilities, and these growth projections will require clarification before new or expanded facilities are finally planned.

2. REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF EXISTING FACILITIES

In order to determine the feasibility of adapting the present County Court Building to the new expanded role that has been assigned to the County Courts, we performed an on-site inspection of both the County Jail and Scotts Bluff County Court House.

Existing County Jail Facility:

The Jail facility is a relatively new building, less than ten (10) years old and was designed to house approximately ninety (90) inmates. It can accommodate adult male and female offenders as well as male and female juvenile offenders. The Jail is well managed, clean, orderly and above reproach. A fire exit violation identified by the State Fire Marshall is shortly to be corrected. The facility is, however, under-utilized and Sheriff James Miller indicated that the facility normally houses only fifteen (15) to twenty (20) inmates or approximately 25% of its capacity. A portion of the basement of this building is used for the storage of County records and it was indicated that if the County could move these records elsewhere, a training program could be initiated by the sheriff in this space.

The Jail has a direct second level protected connection to the present County Court House, but once prisoners are admitted to the Court House, a security problem exists.

The County Courts Building:

This building is adjacent to the County Jail and fronts on Tenth Street in Gering. It was constructed approximately fifty (50) years ago and originally housed the Scotts Bluff County Court and County Office space. Presently, the building has been adapted to serve as a partial County Office Building as well as the County Court House. These two functions are ill-suited to each other in the existing building, and the resulting inefficiencies in the use of the building are well recognized by the County Administration, Judicial System and users of the facility.

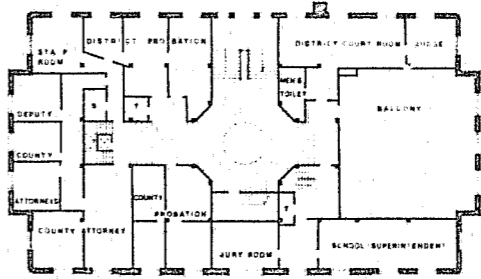
There are no drawings of the construction of the existing building, but it appears that the supporting columns are of reinforced concrete, the internal walls are of structural clay tile and the floors are composite concrete and wood. The external walls are of face brick, concrete and stone.

There are a series of major operational defects in this building; they include - electrical overloads, lack of structural fire-protection and antiquated heating and air conditioning equipment. The building is partially air conditioned with noisy and inefficient equipment.

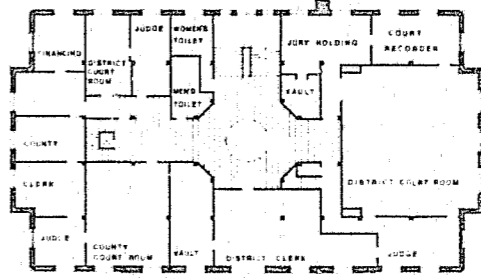
On Page Seven of this report, a schedule is included, summarizing our review of these existing deficiencies and possible corrective measures that could be taken to bring the building to an acceptable standard. To correct the existing deficiencies will be costly, however, it is our opinion that, upon completion, the useful life of the building will not be extended sufficiently to warrant the expenditures that would be required to raise the building to present day safety code standards.

The most serious deficiency in the building, however, is the lack of protected fire exits leading to street level. The remedy for this would be to introduce non-combustible stairs through the entire building, with protected corridors connecting at each level, a major remodeling and costly project.

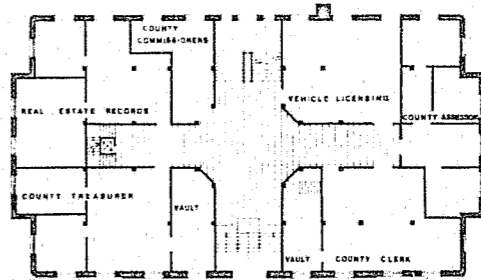
USE OF EXISTING COURTHOUSE



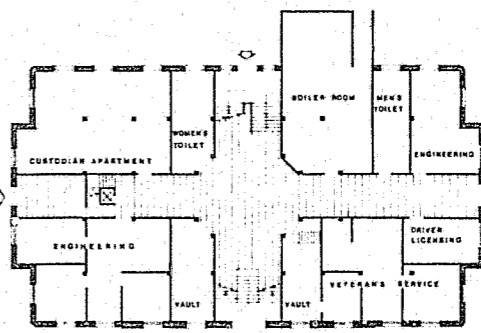
THIRD FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR

0 5 10 15 20

EXISTING COURTHOUSE PROBLEMS:

PROBLEM #1:

- High fire risk building with no fire-protected exits and cul-de-sac offices with only one entrance.
- No fire alarm system.
- No sprinkler system.
- Minimum Solution - Add fire stairs with protected corridor access providing at least two (2) means of escape from each floor - discharge stairs at grade.

PROBLEM #2:

- Inefficient use of interior space due to structural limitations and incremental changes.
- Solution - Building not suitable for functions that require flexible and changing space, e.g., offices.

PROBLEM #3:

- Presents poor County Seat and County Court image.
- Solution - Enhance symbolic aspect of building by reducing occupancy and taking out non-related uses.

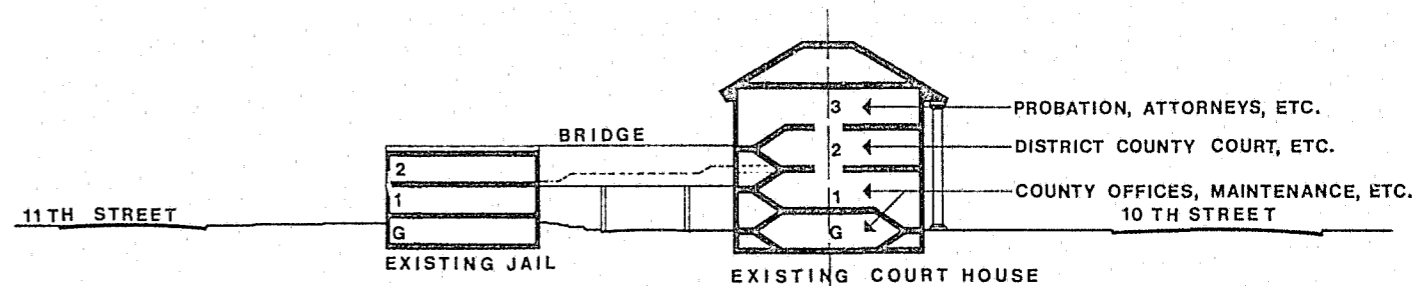
PROBLEM #4:

- Confusing access and circulation for public and police with prisoners, inadequate public facilities including elevator and toilets, and security problems for police.
- Minimum Solution - Simplify public access and circulation take-out and replace elevator, increase public toilet and waiting facilities and provide secure prisoner holding rooms adjacent to court rooms.

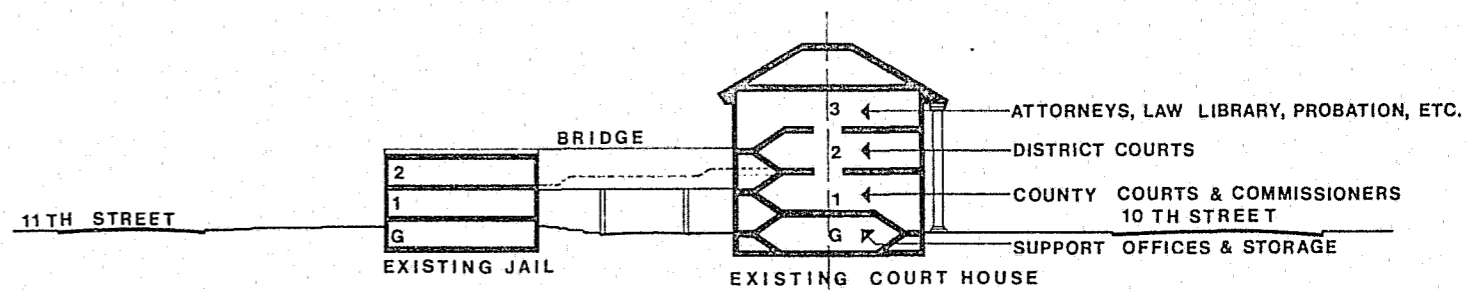
PROBLEM #5:

- Inadequate utilities, especially air conditioning and electric systems.
- Solution - New utility systems only feasible if building to be extensively remodeled, continued piece-meal extension of utility systems not recommended.

POSSIBLE RE-USE OF EXISTING COURTHOUSE



EXISTING USE AS JAIL-COURT-OFFICE FACILITY



POSSIBLE RE-USE AS JAIL-COURT FACILITY

3. SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS

A series of interviews were conducted by us with the principal elected and appointed officers having jurisdiction and management responsibility in the County and District Courts and those County Office functions in the present Court House.

These interviews included the County Board of Commissioners, representatives of the Bar Association, District and County Judges, District Attorneys, court recorders, county clerks office, probation office, County Sheriff, as well as officers and staff of the various County Office functions in the existing Court House building.

At the conclusion of the interviews, the following summary observations could be made about the use of the existing Court House:

- Due to the makeshift nature of the facility, a poor image exists for the County Seat, Judicial and County Office functions that are currently housed in the Court House facility. As an example of this, the County Commissioners Board Room is also used as a camera room by the Registrar's Office.
- Limited day to day circulation occurs between the Judicial, police and jail functions and the County Office functions.

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- With the exception of socially oriented aspects of the Judicial function (probation, counseling, etc.), the Courts and their immediately related facilities are not likely to experience extensive requirements for growth in the foreseeable future.
 - Most of the County Office functions in the existing Court House have growth and expansion requirements with increased personnel.
 - General inefficiency, discomfort and confusion are experienced by Management staff and visitors to the Court House, due to the cramped and overcrowded conditions that prevail, with fragmented departments dispersed on the four (4) levels of the building.
 - There is a general concern over the inadequacy of the public facilities in the Court House, especially the antiquated elevator, lack of toilets, poorly arranged public waiting spaces and poor directional signing.
 - Storage of documents and their retrieval is another general problem and an inefficiency affecting all users of the Court House facility. Despite the use of microfilm, documents are stored in the adjacent County Jail Building.

4. ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTS

From our analysis of the land holdings and facilities at the existing Court-Jail complex, from interviews with officials and personnel, from the study of County statistical data, including population growth, crime statistics, etc., and by the application of current standards in Court planning and design, the following alternative development concepts are proposed:

- In each of the following alternatives, a series of advantages and disadvantages are presented in summary form as follows:

ALTERNATIVE #1:

This proposes the demolition of the existing Court House and its replacement by a new County Court and Office complex.

Advantages:

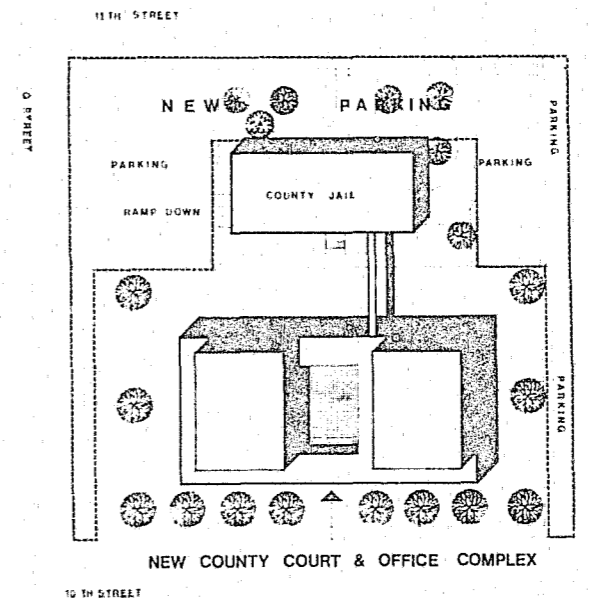
- Retains security relationship of Court facility to Jail.
- Allows for optimum development of entire block.
- Maximizes investment dollars by concentrating development.
- Provides integrated building complex.
- Reduces long term maintenance to a minimum.
- Creates new image for County Court System and County Government.

Disadvantages:

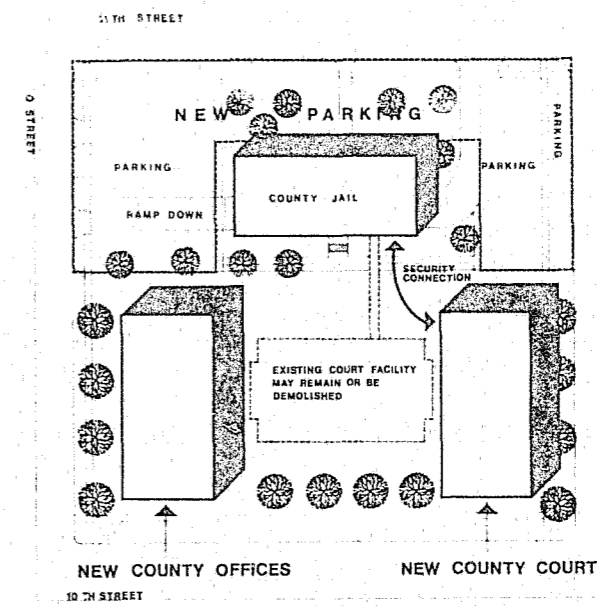
- Removes important building in Gering.
- Requires temporary relocation of Court and Office functions.
- Requires maximum investment in one phase.

DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES

ALTERNATIVE ONE



ALTERNATIVE TWO



ALTERNATIVE #2:

This proposes building to the North and South of the existing Court House which may be removed or may remain.

Advantages:

- Allows staged development without relocation of Court or Office functions.
- Allows phased development and expenditure.
- Could retain existing Court House.

Disadvantages:

- Poor image if existing Court House demolished and Jail facility exposed.
- Higher construction and maintenance costs than Alternative #1.
- Poor County Jail - Court House relationship.
- Poor disposition of facilities and poor long term use of land.
- Excessive building area and maintenance if existing Court facility retained.

ALTERNATIVE #3:

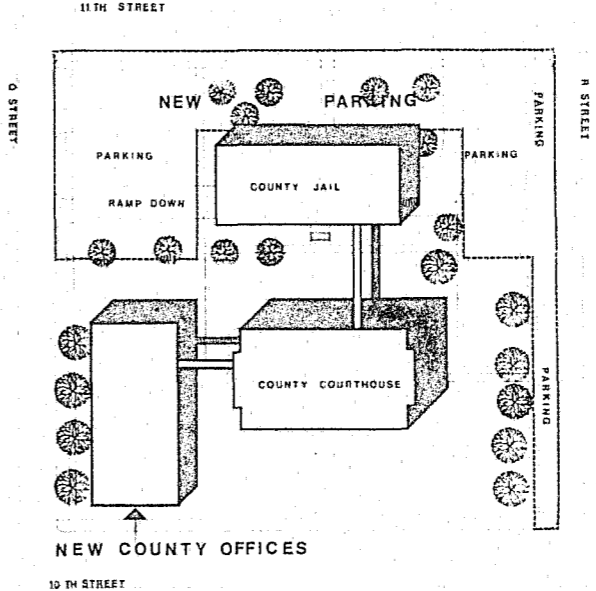
This proposes building a County Office facility to the South of the existing Court House.

Advantages:

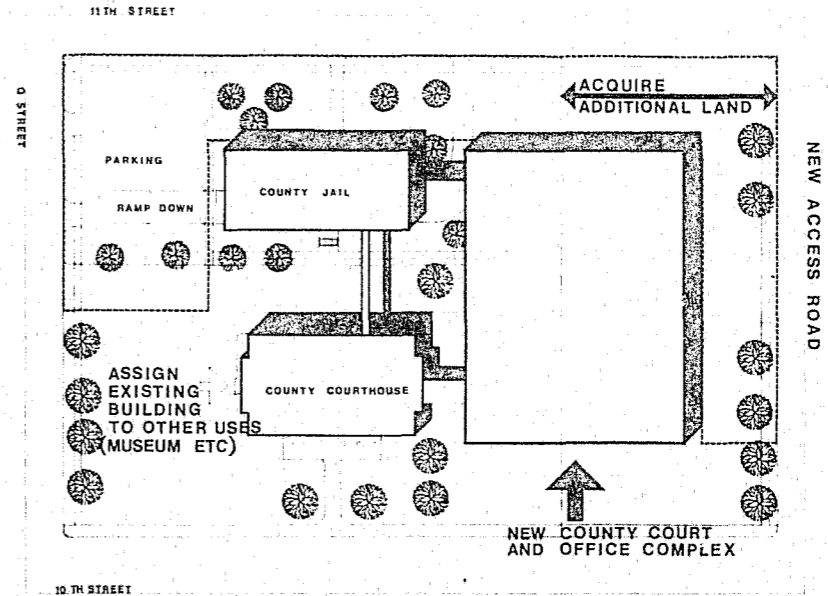
- Minimum initial cost.
- No relocation of offices.
- Preserves existing building.

DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES

ALTERNATIVE THREE



ALTERNATIVE FOUR



Disadvantages:

- Little improvement to existing image of County Seat.
- Costly investment in extensively remodeling existing Court House.
- New office wing will conflict with scale of existing Court House.
- Inefficient and oversized Court House Building costly to maintain.

ALTERNATIVE #4:

This proposes acquiring additional land to the North of the existing parcel containing the County Jail and Court House. Originating at a meeting with members of the Bar Association, it was not possible during this period of consultation to fully investigate this proposal. It is, however, included as an alternate method of development, and it is strongly recommended that the feasibility of acquiring additional land be further examined.

Advantages:

- Removes existing Jail facility from center of the site, allowing more options for Master Plan development.
- Allows development of optimum County Court - Office Complex on one or two floors without demolishing existing Court House.
- Creates new image for County facilities in a larger setting than the other alternatives.

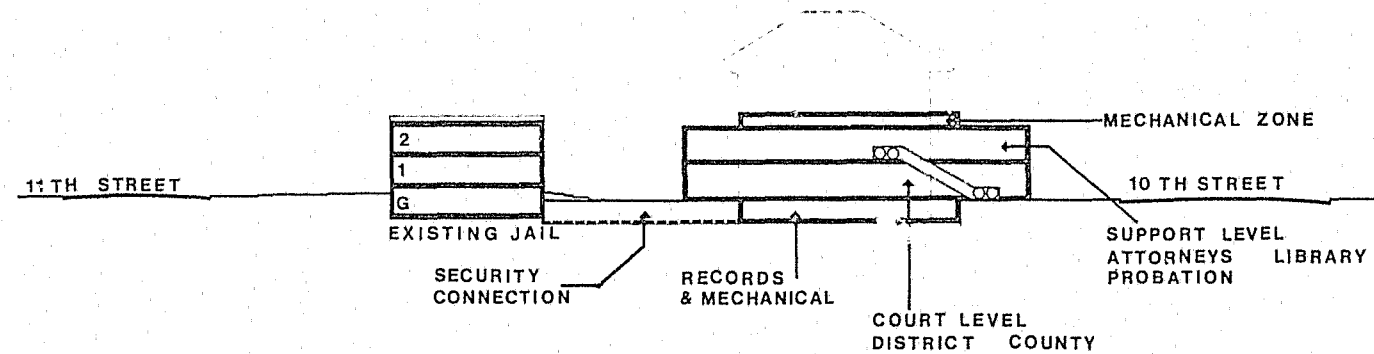
- Increased area for additional parking and landscaping.

Disadvantages:

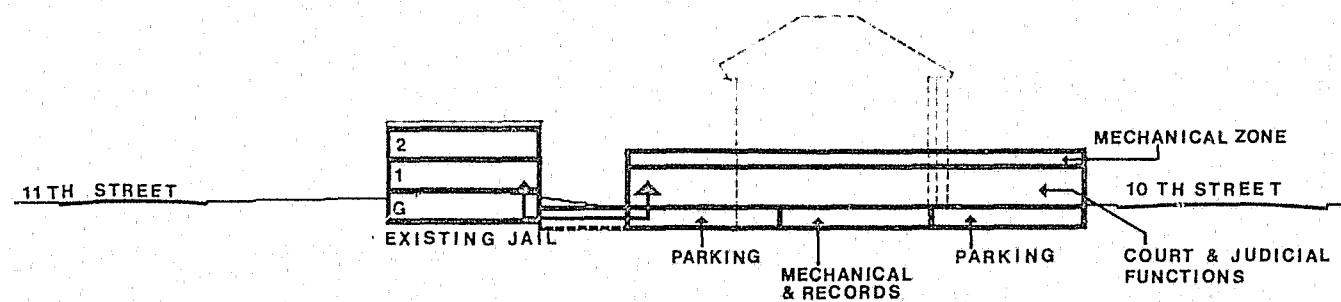
- Cost and potential difficulty of acquiring additional land, including "R" Street.
- Additional cost of site development, landscaping and maintenance.
- If present Court House is retained, other uses must be found for it, e.g., Community uses, museum, etc.

POSSIBLE COURT FACILITY CONFIGURATION

POSSIBLE TWO LEVEL COURTHOUSE & TWO LEVEL COUNTY OFFICES



POSSIBLE ONE LEVEL COURTHOUSE & COUNTY OFFICES



EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVES:

The evaluation matrix below illustrates our appraisal of the performance of the four (4) major development alternatives against each other on a points basis. The method of rating is as follows:

- 4 points - High score.
- 3 points - Above average score.
- 2 points - Below average score.
- 1 point - Low score.

EVALUATION ITEMS	ALTERNATIVES:			
	1	2	3	4
First Cost	2	2	4	2*
Cost and Long Term Maintenance	4	2	2	3
Optimum Return on Investment	4	2	2	4
Image of County Facilities	4	2	1	4
Short Term Inconvenience	1	3	3	4
Long Term Operational Benefits	3	2	1	4
Allows Future Development	3	1	3	4
TOTAL SCORES	21	14	16	25

* Cost and availability of land not known.

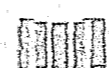
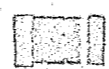
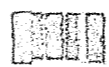
This general appraisal indicates that subject to the availability of obtaining additional land, alternative #4 would produce the most desirable long term development. Alternative #1 would also provide an excellent development plan, with alternatives #2 and #3 providing less desirable long term benefits and giving generally poor return on investment.

5 CONSULTANTS RECOMMENDATIONS & FURTHER ACTION REQUIRED

In arriving at our recommendations for action, we had the benefit of an on-site investigation, interviews with the County Commissioner, interviews with all key department heads and Court personnel, interviews with the County and District Judges and with members of the Bar Association.

In summary, we would recommend the following:

- The present County office building should, if possible, be abandoned and new County offices and Court facilities should be constructed for these functions, or additional land acquired to the North of the present facilities.
- If the County Commissioners feel that additional information is required to more precisely understand the development costs involved, then the following studies should be initiated:
 1. A space program should be developed for both the County Offices and for the County and District Court facilities. This space program is necessary to verify the tentative conclusions reached by us. The most reliable information obtainable during this study indicated that approximately 30,000 square feet of space would be needed, equally divided between the County Offices and the Courts.
 2. Based on this space program and upon schematic plans for each alternative described in Section 4 above, a preliminary cost estimate should be prepared so that



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