



TENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF VIRGINIA
THE COURTHOUSE
FARMVILLE, VIRGINIA 23901

Donald C. Blessing
Chief Judge

P.O. BOX 351
TELEPHONE 434-392-5171

December 16, 2024

Derek Stamey, County Administrator
Cumberland County
P.O. Box 110
Cumberland, Virginia 23040
dstamey@cumberlandcounty.virginia.gov

Re: Courthouse Addition

Dear Derek,

Thank you for giving Ms. Martin, my Clerk, and I an update on the needed courthouse addition.

In April of 2023, I initiated a discussion with you about this. To your credit you took this seriously. Since that moment, you have been thoughtful, considerate, cooperative, and contributing in this process. Your background and previous employment lends itself well to the furtherance of the process. You have known who to contact, when to speed the process, and when to slow it. All of the stakeholders view you as a meaningful partner who is advocating for the County's interest and what is needed for the judicial system.

The process, to date, has included:

1. Review of the Virginia Court and Facilities Guidelines. These have been revised and, if adopted, should be provided to the judiciary and the public by the first of the year. Cumberland's facilities fall short in many regards having been built under guidelines used about 50 years ago.
2. Two security assessments commissioned by the county. Each show the court building to be seriously lacking, putting those in the building (judges, court personnel, litigants, and general public) at risk. One rated most parts of the building around 60% or less. One important office was significantly below 50%. The Sheriff does an excellent job with a largely indefensible building.
3. Consideration of ADA standards. Virginia recently became the subject of additional mandates resulting from litigation.

4. Functionality and design surveys. Consultants hired by the county surveyed the stakeholders about needs (based on population growth and case load projections). All agree that the look and appeal of this Jeffersonian Courthouse must remain and be enhanced and complemented. The building and the grounds should remain a focal point of certain community activities.

Initially both you and I doubted that the present building could be renovated and improved. We feared that a completely new building would be required. This would entail moving away from the beautiful existing building and abandoning the use of perfectly good holding cells.

The Clerk, Sheriff, and the Commonwealth Attorney, as citizens of the county, have been conscious of the financial impact of a new facility while recognizing the urgent need for a better one. I share their concerns, but my primary obligation is to the betterment of the judicial system, protection of the public and more efficient service to them.

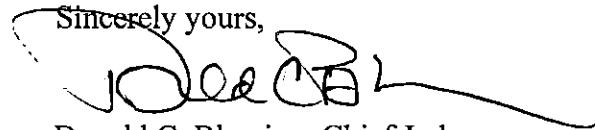
The consultants provided five options: an addition and four completely new separate "stand alone" facilities. A review of the options indicated that the facilities were suitable for an addition. The choice of an addition is the best one. It is less costly and makes use of a significant amount of the present facilities (courtrooms and holding cells). It provides upgrades for the occupants and a desperately needed additional court room. It keeps the beauty and integrity of the present courthouse and grounds.

Unlike most courthouse modernization projects in Virginia, there has been no discussion of litigation. We have progressed with communication, cooperation, and collaboration. To do otherwise consumes time and expenditure of funds which could be devoted to the project. My firm belief is that continuing on the present course will result in a less costly and much better product.

I request that the Board of Supervisors move forward by authorizing the expenditure of funds necessary to advertise for bids on architect and engineering plans as well as the money to hire same. This will result in concrete proposals and cost estimates permitting informed and intelligent decision making on this matter. Ultimately, I urge funding the entire project and completion of it.

Please pass my request and thoughts on to the Board of Supervisors for their consideration and action.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donald C. Blessing", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Donald C. Blessing, Chief Judge