

**State Bar of Arizona Task Force on Persons with Disabilities
Accessibility Committee Site Visit
Santa Cruz County Superior Court
Nogales, Arizona**

SURVEY BACKGROUND

Facility: Santa Cruz County Superior Court, 2150 N. Congress Drive, Nogales, AZ 85628

Date: November 17, 2003

Team: Sally Simmons (team leader)(Lewis and Roca LLP); Emily Johnston (Board of Governors, State Bar of Arizona); Jim Reed (Jaburg & Wilk PC)

Court Personnel: Frank Corrales, Court Administrator; Victor Gabilonda, Public Works Director and Jesse Espinoza, Facility Manager. We also visited Judges James Soto, Anna Montoya-Paez, and Kimberly Corsaro.



Overview

The Santa Cruz County Courthouse is part of the Santa Cruz County Complex. It is housed on the second floor of the complex. The County has land to the east of the existing building and hopes to expand its facilities, with the possibility that the courts will be housed in a separate building. At present one of the justice court courtrooms as well as three separate court rooms for superior court and the clerk's office are all located on the same floor of the building. Court personnel who joined us in our tour of the building were most helpful and were well informed about most ADA issues. The Facility Manager, Jesse Espinoza, regularly attends classes on the ADA. The staff members also were eager to learn more and to make changes if possible. Like other court house staffs, they indicated a great interest in receiving the Task Force report.

Parking

There is open parking for court personnel, visitors, jurors, attorneys and judges surrounding the building. Accessible spaces are marked.



Suggestion: It is suggested that signs be placed indicating that accessible parking is available in the back of the building as that is the most accessible entrance to the courtrooms.

Entrances and Exits

There is a ramp leading up to a side entrance for the front doors of the county complex. Unfortunately, the door to the side entrance does not have an automatic door opening button. The door at the front entrance does have such a button, but there are only stair leading to that door, and no ramp exists. In addition, once inside, there was a somewhat long path from the front door to the back of the building to enter through security and take an elevator up to second floor to reach the courts. Access to the courts could be made through the back of the building leading directly to the second floor. A ramp does lead to the door at the back from the parking lot.



Suggestion: Perhaps the easiest change would be to retrofit the side door in the front entrance to provide for an automatic door opener for the door which is accessible by ramp. In addition, if security could be arranged, it might be possible to have access for persons with disabilities from the back door, directly onto the second floor, thus alleviating the long path through the corridors of the first floor to security and the elevator to the second floor courtrooms. However, there are several doors through which one must pass in order to get from the outside to the actual corridors for the court rooms. The passage way would need to be marked carefully, and perhaps some doors could be removed. Finally, a sign, indicating that disability access to the second floor can be made from the back of the building, could be placed at the front and sides of the building.

Security

All attorneys, employees and visitors apparently must pass through security on the first floor in order to get to there second floor where the courtrooms are located. As noted, this requires a long passage through hallways. However, the elevator is located adjacent to the security. Security personnel were extremely helpful and courteous, although we did not have any opportunity to observe them working with persons with substantial disabilities.

Emergency Evacuation Procedures

While we did not obtain a copy of the emergency evacuation procedures, Court personnel seemed to be well-versed in them and indicated that the plans were, in fact, posted for all who occupied the building to see. They have a fire exit plan and drills are conducted on a periodic basis.

Court Administration

The information center, which is just inside the doors to the front entrance, is easily accessible and the height of the counter did not appear to be too high for someone using a wheelchair. The Clerk's office for Superior court would allow for wheelchair access, although the windows were somewhat high and this height might prevent easy access. The clerk's window for the justice court is located in a corridor next to the justice court courtroom. It also appeared high.

Restrooms

There are restrooms on both the first and the second floor which have facilities for persons with disabilities. The men's restrooms were very well set up and easily accessible for persons with disabilities. While the women's restrooms had stalls for persons with disabilities, they were long and narrow and might present difficulty for a person in a wheelchair. The wash basins in both men's and women's facilities were well placed and had wing faucets, making them easier to turn on.



Suggestion: It might be possible to widen one stall in each of the women's bathrooms by removing the door to the non-accessible stall next to it and removing the toilet from that stall.

Hallways

The hallways were somewhat narrow, and if a new facility is built this could be one improvement that is adopted. Door handles were all of the latch style, thus making them easy to open.

Elevators

There was only one elevator. Numbers were given in Braille. The elevator was large enough for a wheelchair to maneuver.

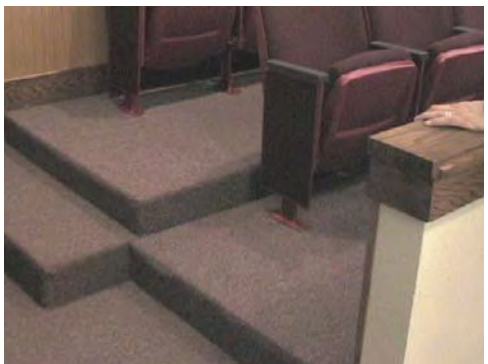
Library

Because a portion of the library had to be converted for a third courtroom, the space in the library is somewhat limited, and might prove difficult for a person using a wheelchair to access. Books also were on shelves that might be too high for ready access.

Courtrooms

There are three courtrooms. We were allowed access to all three. As noted before, assisted listening devices are available for all three. In addition, we were advised that trials could or would be switched from one courtroom to another to make trials accessible for witnesses, jurors or other participants.

A. Courtroom A, the largest, was accessible for lawyers and for spectators. The witness chair and the jury box both had steps in order to sit. While we were there, Mr. Espinoza, who is in charge of all alterations in his capacity as head of facility management, discussed immediate steps which could be taken to bring the witness chair flush with the floor, to shorten the judge's bench height so the judge could observe the witness and to remove one or two seats from the jury box so that a person using a wheelchair could access that space.





B. Courtroom B had the same issues with respect to the step up for the witness box. There was not step up for the jury box, but a juror using a wheelchair would have to sit outside the actual box unless seats are removed. The space for attorneys was adequate, and spectators could sit at the end of rows.



C. Courtroom C is used primarily for juvenile proceedings; consequently there is not need for a jury box. There are tables for lawyers and parties, and some limited access seating. There is a small step up to enter the witness chair, although this could be removed or the witness could sit in front of the witness stand if necessary.

Juror Facilities

The jury deliberation room also is used as a conference room. While it was somewhat narrow, it was reasonably well equipped and had room to move chairs so that a person using a wheelchair could be accommodated. Listening devices are available for jurors. The restrooms are located nearby and water fountains, at appropriate heights, also are nearby.

Judges' Chambers

Because of space problems, there is little space to maneuver through the outside area where the judges' staff sit. This space must be crossed to get to the actual chambers. Once in chambers, there appears to be adequate room for persons with disabilities to move.

Other Facilities

The lunchroom, used by all members of the county building, is on the first floor. There is adequate space in this room for those who may need to use a wheelchair. There are no cooking facilities so there was no need to observe height or other directions or safety features which might be needed for those with low vision or other challenges.

General Observations

Generally all water fountains and telephones were at the correct height. Telephones had TTY features. Doors throughout the building were easily opened and slow closing to make entrance and exit much safer.

The courthouse staff all were eager to be of assistance and were most willing to take steps to remove barriers to accessibility as time and money permitted.

