

**State Bar of Arizona Task Force on Persons with Disabilities
Accessibility Committee Site Visit
Maricopa County Superior Court
Phoenix, Arizona**

SURVEY BACKGROUND

Facility: Maricopa County Superior Court, 101/201 W. Jefferson, Phoenix, AZ 85003; Original Courthouse, 125 W. Washington Street, Phoenix, AZ 85003

Date: February 24, 2004

Team: Scott Greeves (team leader), AZ Department of Revenue; Christina Larson, Jaburg & Wilk P.C.; Jim Reed, Jaburg & Wilk P.C.; Carrie Sherman, State Bar of Arizona

County Personnel: Hugh Gallagher, Deputy Court Administrator; Richard Iburgia, Facilities/Space Planner; Milli Lee, Loss Prevention Consultant



Overview

The Superior Courthouse Complex is located 201 West Jefferson in downtown Phoenix, Arizona, and consists of three connecting buildings (east, central, and west courthouses). The complex also includes the original courthouse, built in 1913 (OCH). OCH is a separate, free-standing building located across the street to the north, at 125 West Washington.



Remodeling to the main complex, built around 1975, is being completed in stages; however, due to budgetary constraints, not all floors or courtrooms will be remodeled. There are four (4) electronic courtrooms in the east and central buildings.

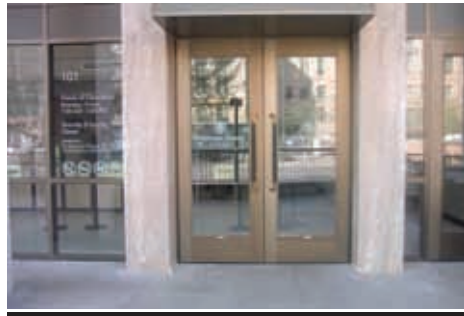
Juror Parking

Free juror parking is at the garage at 5th Avenue and Jackson. It is a long four block walk to the jury assembly room on 3rd Avenue over poorly maintained back streets. The jury shuttle bus from the parking garage to the court building did not have a wheelchair lift.

Entrances and Exits

The main entrance to the east building was recently remodeled. Part of the remodeling involved installing an accessible ramp. Previously, there was only stair access to this entrance. The doors at this entrance have a less than five pound pull, but there is not an automatic opener. Security personnel are always stationed just inside the doorway and can assist someone entering the courthouse.

East Building



In several areas throughout the building, the universal accessibility signs are black and white. We recommend a switch to the more well known and recognizable blue and white signage.

Old Courthouse

Upon approaching the beautiful old building, good signage directs people to the accessible ramped entrance. Once inside, there is a ramp from lower ground level to first floor and the elevators.





Security Evacuation/Emergencies

Court employees are trained to serve as floor wardens and know how to direct people to exits.

Evacuation procedures are covered in jury orientation.

According to court administrators, the City of Phoenix discourages the use of collapsible chairs to evacuate those who cannot negotiate stairs.

Court Administration – Central Building

At the main filing counter (non-family court counter) it was noted that there is no "cutout" to enable a person using a wheelchair to fully approach the counter.



Suggestion: It is recommended that at least one counter window has a space cut out so someone using a wheelchair can approach "head on."

Family Court Administration – Central Building

The family court filing counter has one low counter. This low counter is fairly accessible to a person using a wheelchair.

Old Courthouse Building

The Counter height is relatively high and inaccessible.



Restrooms

West Court Building

The bathroom nearest the jury assembly area is accessible. However, one must go through an "obstacle course" to reach the bathroom. There is a set of more accessible bathrooms near the elevator banks in the central court building.





Suggestion: It is recommended that signs be posted near the jury bathrooms directing people to the more accessible bathrooms.



East Building

There is a unisex bathroom in the east building lobby near the elevator bank. The bathroom is one small room with a raised toilet and a sink with winged faucet handles. A unisex, accessible bathroom is a wonderful facility that will be useful to many people. This bathroom has the potential to be a model for accessible bathrooms. There is good signage outside the bathroom. The door has less than five pounds of resistance. There is a manual lock on the door. Unfortunately, the lock is mounted rather high and has a very small latch which some might find difficult to grip.

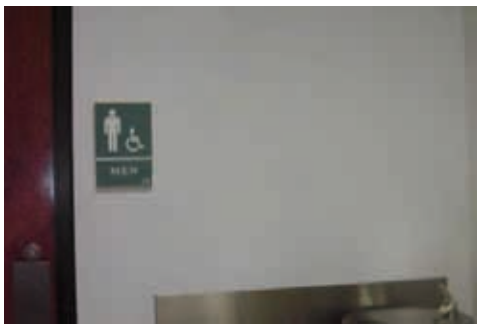




Suggestion: For this bathroom to become universally accessible, we recommend an automatic door opener. The drain pipes under the sink need to be insulated. The manual lock should be replaced with an electro-magnetic lock that can be operated from the inside by a push pad. To see an example, Arizona State University has several electro-magnetic locks installed in unisex bathrooms around its main campus. Additional signage throughout the other court buildings should direct people to this fantastic bathroom.

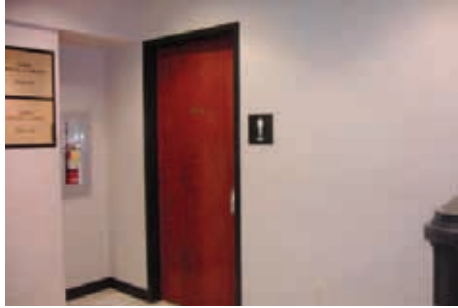
2nd Floor Near Law Library

The sinks have winged faucet handles which is good because it makes it very easy to turn the water on and off. However, it was difficult for a person using a wheelchair to reach the sinks because the counter extended too far out. In other words, the sink was installed too far back.



4th Floor – Central

It appeared that some restrooms on this floor have been remodeled; some have not. We recommend posting signs at less accessible bathrooms that will direct people to the more accessible bathrooms.



7th Floor – Central

The door "knob" on the restrooms is a latch. This makes it difficult for someone with a mobility disability to open the door. Any time there is a latch or a knob to turn it adds another step to the door opening process. We recommend that all bathroom doors swing freely and not latch or require turning a knob.



Also in the restrooms, the towel and soap dispensers should be lowered. The faucets in these bathrooms have a "push type" lever. In other words, to turn on the water, the user must push down on the handle. The faucet runs for several seconds, and then shuts off. This is a great way to conserve water, but these types of faucets are difficult to operate. We recommend at least one sink in every bathroom have wing handles which are easier to operate.



Old Courthouse

The main floor of the Old Courthouse is being remodeled and has the best sinks in all of the complex's restrooms. Suggestion: As long as remodeling is in progress, we recommend improving this bathroom further by adding push buttons to open/close the door. Signage throughout the building could direct people to this "model" bathroom.



5th Floor – Old Courthouse

The public restroom on this floor has been remodeled. Unfortunately, the new bathrooms have door latches. As explained earlier, this makes it difficult for a person with limited or restricted upper body mobility to open the doors.



Suggestion: Replace latches with more accessible handles and adjust tension.



Hallways and Lobbies

The team noticed several instances of jurors having to wait outside courtrooms. In all cases, there were not enough chairs to accommodate everyone waiting. In one case, there were 25 people waiting, but only six chairs. Prolonged standing or being forced to sit on the floor is a problem for the elderly, pregnant women and persons with disabilities. Suggestion: We recommend additional seating in areas outside courtrooms – for everyone's comfort.

The automatic door to the food court/cafeteria did not operate easily. It was necessary to push the button very hard right at the center in order for the door to activate. Suggestions: The push button pad may simply need some maintenance. Some automatic doors in high traffic areas often need regular maintenance.

9th Floor Central

The water fountains in hallways are improperly mounted. The "accessible" water fountain (it has a push bar) is mounted high on the wall. The "inaccessible" fountain is mounted low on the wall, but is impossible for a person using a wheelchair to use because of the fountain's inherent design.



Old Courthouse Water Fountains

These are accessible.



West Building

The main public telephone bank in the West Building has a phone that allows the volume to be adjusted. This is denoted with a blue sign.



East Building

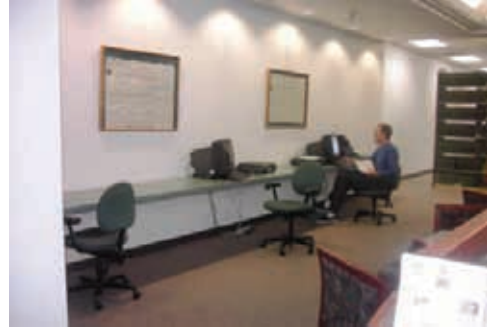
Lower buttons in the elevators were noted.



Law Library

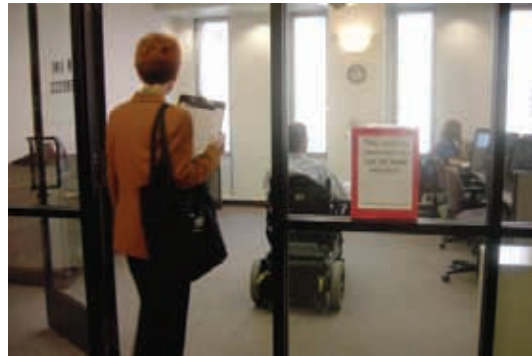
1st Floor Law Library and Self-Service Center

The law library and self service center were quite accessible. While the tables were placed close together, a person using a wheelchair was able to get around. The tables were set at different heights which creates a variety of options for persons using a wheelchair. If a higher table is needed, it is right there!



2nd Floor On-Line Computer Room

The computer room is quite accessible. The computers are placed in work cubicles to which a person using a wheelchair can access easily. The cubicles replaced stand up counters which is a definite plus.



Courtrooms – Central

4th Floor -- Hon. Kenneth Fields

The main double doors accessing many of the courtrooms from the elevator lobbies were quite difficult to open.



The remodeled courtrooms all have a ramp to the jury box and witness stand. The ramp is fixed in place and does not need to be folded out. The ramps themselves are quite accessible, but once a person using a wheelchair reaches the witness stand, the turnaround and maneuvering area is very limited. For people using large wheelchairs or scooters, the space is not sufficient.



The same problem exists with regard to entering the jury box. There is not enough room to turn once a wheelchair enters the jury box. This could limit a juror's ability to see everything in the courtroom. These doors have crash bars. They may be doors required by fire codes, but we are not sure. We recommend investigating whether the doors can be left open or if automatic door openers can be installed.



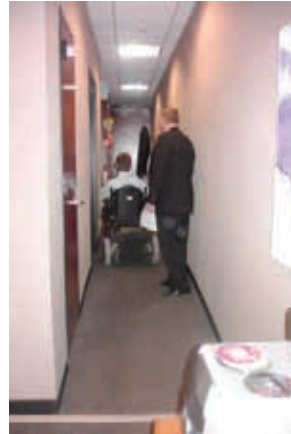
The remodeled courtrooms have ramps from judges' chambers leading to the bench. This is a nice feature. As our population ages, many judges, now and in the future, will make use of these ramps.

Suggestion: These challenges can be easily addressed on any new renovations or new construction. Simply add more room.

5th Floor

The courtrooms on the fifth floor are typical examples of non-remodeled courtrooms. They were constructed around 1975. There is no accessibility to witness stands or jury boxes. A witness using a wheelchair would have to sit in the well and testify. A juror using a wheelchair could not sit in the jury box.

The door leading from the hallway to the courtroom was quite narrow and challenging for a person using a wheelchair to negotiate.



6th Floor – Family Court

The family courtrooms are quite small, but offer good accessibility. They have been remodeled.

7th Floor

Many accessibility issues in the fourth floor courtrooms were also found on the seventh floor. The door leading from the lobby to the courtroom has crash bars. This makes them difficult to open. (See fourth floor discussion).

There is very little room in the witness stand. See the discussion of the Fourth Floor Courtrooms.

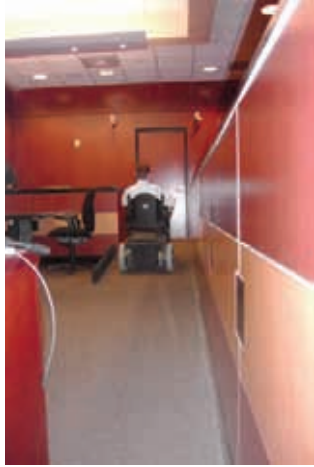


9th Floor

The Ninth Floor Courtrooms are not slated for remodeling.

There are no ramps in the courtroom: therefore, no access to the witness stand or jury box. There is no ramp from the judge's chamber to the bench. Overall, these courtrooms are not accessible.





Courtrooms – Old Courthouse

1st Floor

This courtroom is accessible, including the jury box and stand.



3rd Floor

This is a ceremonial courtroom in its original condition. As such, it is not very accessible.



Juror Facilities – West Building

The jury assembly area is located in the West Court building. The area is open and spacious. There is sufficient maneuvering room for persons using a wheelchair. The jury informational video was closed captioned. The TV monitors which show movies, however, are not closed captioned.



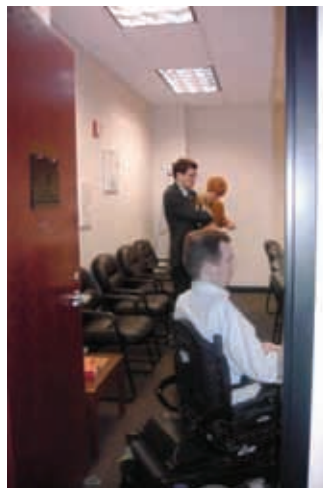


According to court personnel, pamphlets and information mailed to potential jurors contain information about accessibility and instructions on how to request special accommodations. However, one member of our Disability Committee recently received a jury summons which had no information about accessibility: nothing about wheelchair access, or what to do if a juror has a vision or hearing disability.

The information desk at the jury assembly room had no informational pamphlets about accessibility.

5th Floor, Central

The jury room offered only small, tight quarters. It did not seem very accessible (not even the water fountain).



Old Courthouse

The Jury Room is accessible.



Chambers – Old Courthouse

The fifth floor has been newly remodeled. It houses the presiding judge and staff.

6th Floor

This floor is in the process of being remodeled. It will open to the public as a Legal History Museum. Most of this floor is accessible as per its purpose. The original jail cells have been retained as an exhibit. The jail cell doors are very narrow and cannot be accessed by a person using a wheelchair.

Other Facilities

3rd Floor – East Building

The conference rooms are accessible to persons using a wheelchair. There are lever handles on doors which make it easier for people with limited hand mobility or limited strength to turn the doorknob.

2nd Floor – West Building

On the second floor, court administration remodeled an office for an employee who uses an electric wheelchair. The area was widened and a second door was installed. Additionally, the employee's work surfaces were raised up to an accessible height.



Layton Construction Model Courtroom Display/Mockup

As part of the Maricopa County survey, Hugh Gallagher invited the survey team to review and comment on the Model Courtroom for future new construction and renovations. The designers of the courtroom faced a dilemma common to much of the courtroom construction nationwide seeking a fully accessible structure; whether to place the Judge's Bench in the courtroom center, as is traditional, or in the corner of the courtroom. Center placement of the Bench maintains the psychology of the Judge commanding the courtroom's events, but usually requires a larger courtroom "footprint" to accommodate a larger, accessible courtroom "well."

By comparison, placement of the Bench in the corner of the courtroom permits a fully accessible entry to a witness stand without noticeably increasing the size of the courtroom "well." However, because of the position of the Judge's Bench, it is viewed by some members of the Bench as reducing their control over the courtroom's events, and thereby affects the quality of the proceedings.

Viewed exclusively within the context of accessible design versus square footage and cost, there is no easy answer to this issue. However, the increasing occurrence of consolidated, multi-party litigation, along with class actions requiring additional counsel, and the use of large exhibits or electronic exhibit monitors, all call for larger courtroom "well" space. The result is that the trends in the nature of litigation that actually proceeds to hearing or trial, may resolve this tradeoff, permitting center Benches by requiring larger courtroom wells.

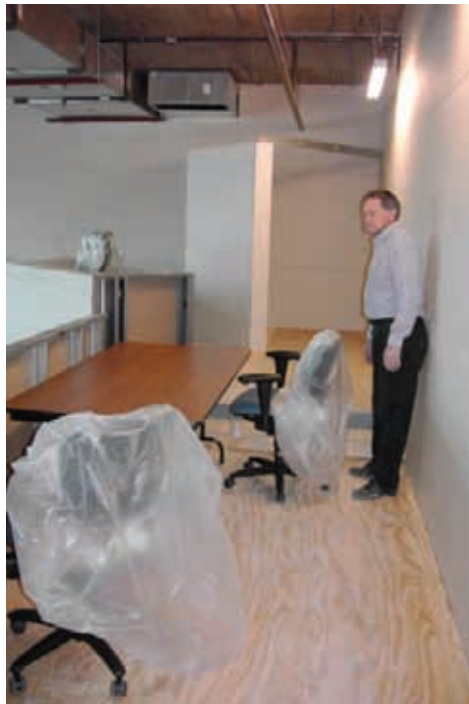
The Bench appears in the right corner of the design courtroom.



On the left side of the courtroom, to the Judge's right, are the witness stand and then the jury box.



On the right side of the design courtroom, to the Judge's left, is the judicial clerk's table.



The Jury Box is to the Judge's far right, on the left side of the courtroom and directly opposite and facing the judicial clerk's table.



The Layton Construction courtroom design was accessible, with appropriate access to the witness stand and jury box. It is a design intended for implementation in new Maricopa County Court construction.

General Observations

The team had a great opportunity to meet with Jeff Swan, the historical architect, who was working on the remodel project of the original courthouse. We explained to him some of our concerns, especially concerns about the latches on the bathroom doors. He was open to and interested in our recommendations.

This is an impressive complex, undergoing extensive renovation. Hugh Gallagher was among the most informed individuals on ADA compliance who we encountered on the entire statewide survey. The commitment of Maricopa County Court Management to accessibility for persons with disabilities was evident throughout the tour.

