



# REPORT TO COUNCIL City of Sacramento

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915 I Street, Sacramento, CA 95814-2604  
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**Staff Report**  
**June 15, 2010**

**Honorable Mayor and  
Members of the City Council**

**Title: Proposed California Superior Court Sites**

**Location/Council District:** The Railyards and Capitol Mall/District 1

**Recommendation:** Adopt a **Resolution** Supporting Development of a New California Superior Courthouse in the Central City, with a preference for the proposed Railyards site.

**Contact:** Denise Malvetti, Senior Project Manager, 808-7064; Leslie Fritzsche, Downtown Redevelopment Manager, 808-5450

**Presenters:** Denise Malvetti and Leslie Fritzsche

**Department:** Economic Development Department

**Division:** Downtown

**Organization No:** 18001021

## **Description/Analysis**

**Issue:** The State of California acting by and through the Judicial Council of California, Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) is in the process of selecting a site for a new Superior Courthouse in Downtown Sacramento. The existing Gordon D. Schaber courthouse was built in 1965 and is an antiquated and cramped facility. It is anticipated that the new courthouse will be approximately 400,000 square feet and will encompass a full city block. The building is anticipated to be between 12 and 16 stories in height and contain 44 courtrooms. The basement of the courthouse will contain 50 secured parking spaces and the courthouse will have an increased demand for approximately 250 off-site parking spaces. The estimated project cost is approximately \$440 million.

In addition to the major investment in Downtown, the proposed project has significant economic benefits to the City of Sacramento during construction and

long term. It is anticipated that the construction of the courthouse will create approximately 1,200 to 1,800 direct construction jobs throughout the duration of the construction, jobs which also result in indirect economic benefits to other businesses in the area. Once completed, the new courthouse will have approximately 397 permanent employees, increasing the number of Downtown court-related employees by 82. Additional economic benefits are realized by the City through the 5,000 people who visit the courthouse each day resulting in 1.2 million people per year who can dine and shop in the surrounding area. It is critical that the City continues to work with the AOC to ensure that the existing courthouse jobs are retained and expanded to provide additional employment opportunities to our residents.

The AOC estimates that construction will start in early 2013 and will be completed in Summer 2015. When the proposed new courthouse opens, the Schaber Courthouse will undergo a renovation that will leave 17 active courtrooms and consolidate court-related operations such as legal research, court reporting, settlement conferencing and numerous administrative functions that are currently located in leased facilities in various parts of the Central City.

A project of this scale that addresses four urban street frontages will have significant impacts on the surrounding area. It is therefore important to consider surrounding uses, key urban design principles and economic impacts in the site selection process. In order to ensure the highest quality courthouse, staff recommends incorporating the following elements in the planning, design and construction process.

Community Outreach: Because of the magnitude and impact on the surroundings, it is critical that the AOC engage the community during the planning and design process. Community outreach to the adjacent neighborhoods and areas such as Alkali Flat and the central business district should be incorporated into the development process.

Landmark Architecture: The Central City contains several iconic buildings and The State Courthouse is an opportunity to add an additional landmark building to the Central City skyline.

Vibrant Central City: It is the city's goal to create a vibrant, safe and attractive Central City. The Railyards and Central City Urban Design Guidelines call for a mix of uses which can be accomplished by integrating a mixture either vertically or horizontally within a specific area. Recognizing the need for Courthouse security which will preclude ground floor retail uses, it is vital that the Courthouse design be planned to ensure as activated a ground floor as possible and have a relationship with surrounding uses. The proposed Courthouse design should complement existing and proposed future adjacent uses.

Engage the Street: In order to activate the Central City, the City desires buildings that engage the street. Keeping in mind the need for Courthouse security, the future

courthouse shall strive to include façade articulation, ground-floor transparency, enhance the pedestrian experience and have an engaging presence at the street level. In order to mitigate the impacts of any required setbacks, the AOC should strive to create semi-public outdoor spaces such as on site plazas, patio courtyards, terraces and gardens that enhance the street presence and engage the passer-by. Landscaping should be used to activate building facades, highlight important architectural features, and screen less attractive elements. Measures designed to enliven the street and create a sense of safety should be incorporated.

Sustainability: The building design, construction and operations should strive to incorporate sustainable and smart development principles with the goal of achieving LEED Silver.

Lighting: In order to activate the building during the evenings and on weekends, lighting should be an important piece of the design. Techniques such as uplighting of the façade should be incorporated to further enhance the building's architectural character and enliven the skyline. Lighting should be appropriate for ground floor uses and respectful of adjacent uses.

Two locations are currently under consideration by the AOC including one site on H Street between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> streets (Lot 41) within the Downtown Sacramento Railyards and a site located on Capitol Mall between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> streets (locations shown on Attachment 1).

Because of the enormous economic benefits to the City, staff recommends supporting the construction of a new superior courthouse in the Central City, with a preference for locating it in The Railyards. The construction of the courthouse in The Railyards will jump start vertical development and provides an opportunity for a landmark building in the area. The benefits to the Railyards site include proximity to rail and bus service at the adjacent Intermodal Facility; proximity to existing court functions, jury parking and the proposed 5<sup>th</sup> Street parking garage; and further leverage of federal, state and local funds already invested in the Railyards infrastructure.

The proposed site on Capitol Mall, while still providing significant economic benefits to the City, is a less preferred site from an urban land use perspective. It is one of the last sites on Capitol Mall and its location warrants not only a significant architectural statement (which the proposed Courthouse is intended to feature) but a project that could activate the street by including vibrant ground floor uses. This is not possible with the court building. For security purposes, the proposed courthouse will not have any ground floor retail-type uses thus significantly limiting street activation. The site is also further from light rail than the Railyards site.

**Policy Considerations:** The development of the State Courthouse supports the City's policy of expanding economic development throughout the City by creating 1,200 to 1,800 construction jobs and retaining and expanding permanent employment in the City of Sacramento. Further, the employees and visitors of the

Courthouse provide economic benefits to the surrounding businesses and the City.

**Environmental Considerations:**

**California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA):** The support of a proposed project location is an administrative activity that is not subject to CEQA review. The AOC will undertake the CEQA review process once a project site is selected.

**Sustainability Considerations:** The location of the Superior Courthouse at The Railyards adjacent to the Intermodal Facility will promote the use of public transportation thereby reducing daily vehicle trips and improving air quality.

Staff will work with the AOC to encourage the development of a sustainable building that will decrease energy dependence.

**Commission/Committee Action:** None.

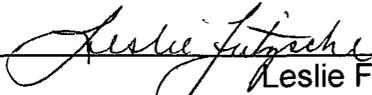
**Rationale for Recommendation:** Staff recommends supporting the construction of the Superior Courthouse in the Central City because of the numerous economic benefits to the City of Sacramento. Staff further supports the development of the Courthouse in The Railyards because of the proximity to existing court facilities and complementary uses. Additionally, the Courthouse is an opportunity to jumpstart development in The Railyards and its close proximity to rail and bus service make it an accessible site for employees, jurors and visitors.

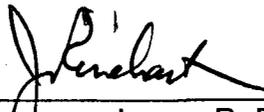
The AOC is on an aggressive timeline in order to acquire the property by July 2011. The two sites will go before the Public Works Board in August 2010 for initial approval to begin the environmental review and commence property acquisition negotiations. It is anticipated that final selection will take place by the end of 2010. The Sacramento facility is considered a priority project and funds have been allocated for the construction of the courthouse through a 2008 Senate Bill (SB1407). Should the AOC miss these critical deadlines, they jeopardize losing the funds to another facility and therefore Sacramento would miss out on the nearly half billion dollar investment, employment opportunities, and economic benefits.

The City of Sacramento should fully support this landmark project and the many benefits it will bring. The City seeks to assist the AOC in ensuring that this Courthouse best serves the needs of the Court system, the taxpayers and the citizens of Sacramento.

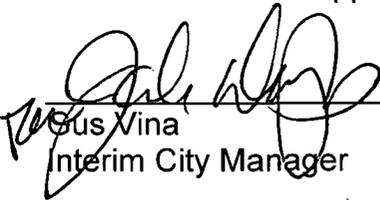
**Financial Considerations:** None.

**Emerging Small Business Development (ESBD):** None.

Respectfully Submitted by:   
Leslie Fritzsche  
Downtown Development Manager

Approved by:   
James R. Rinehart  
Director, Economic Development Department

Recommendation Approved:

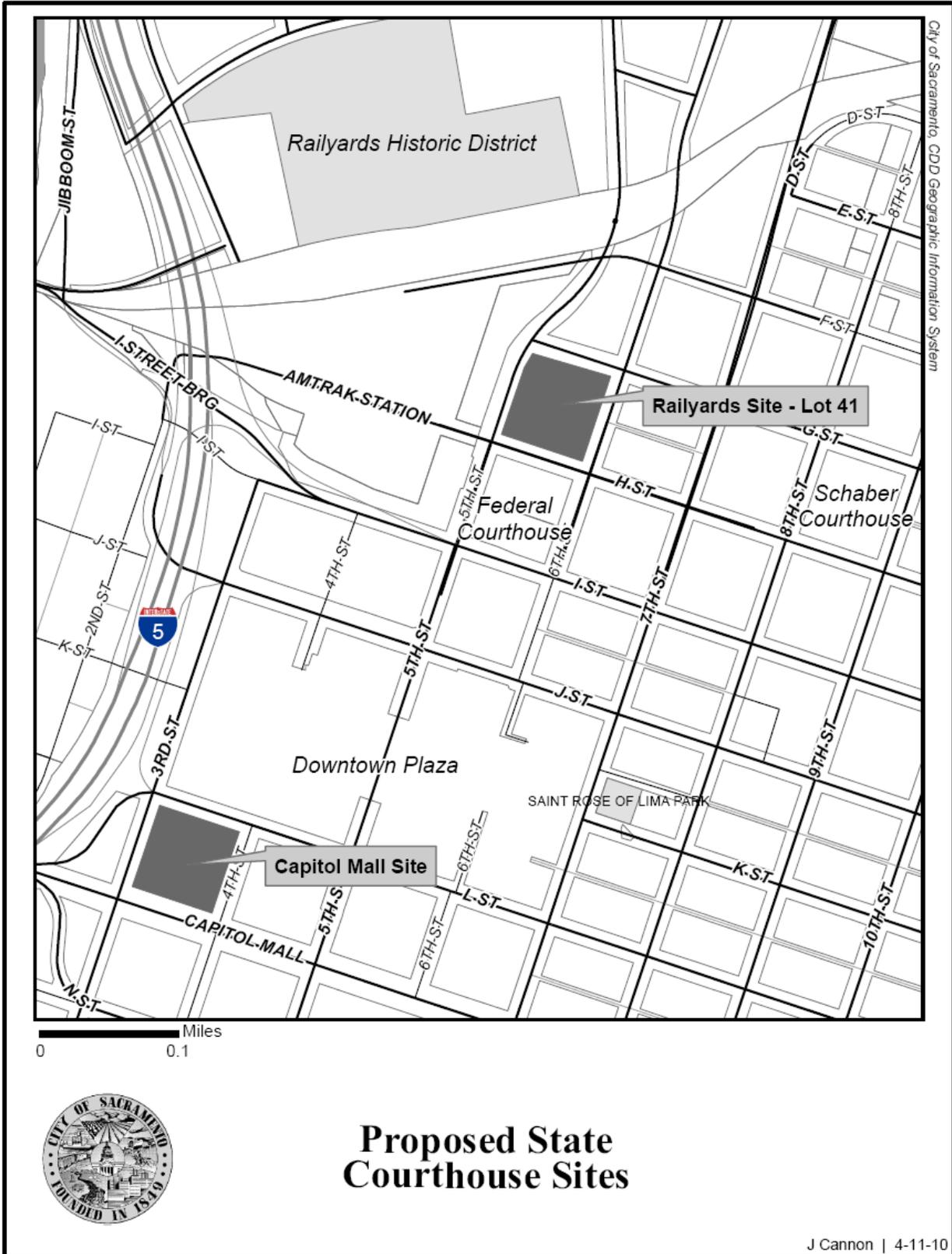
  
Gus Vina  
Interim City Manager

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**Attachment 1**

**Location Map**



**Attachment 2**

**RESOLUTION NO.**

Adopted by the Sacramento City Council

**SUPPORT OF SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA NEW COURTHOUSE IN THE RAILYARDS**

**BACKGROUND**

- A. The State of California desires to build a new Superior Courthouse in Sacramento County.
- B. The proposed courthouse will encompass an entire city block and the building will be approximately 400,000 square feet, 12 to 16 stories in height, and contain 44 courtrooms.
- C. The construction of the new courthouse will create approximately 1,200 to 1,800 direct construction jobs per year and when complete will have approximately 397 employees.
- D. The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) has evaluated numerous sites in the Sacramento area and has shortlisted two sites in the Central City; one at 5<sup>th</sup> and H streets (Lot 41 in The Railyards) and one at 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and Capitol Mall. These sites are to be submitted to the State Public Works Board for consideration at its August meeting.
- E. The AOC desires to acquire the property for the new courthouse by July 2011 and begin construction in early 2013.

**BASED ON THE FACTS SET FORTH IN THE BACKGROUND, THE CITY COUNCIL RESOLVES AS FOLLOWS:**

- Section 1. The City of Sacramento supports the development of a new courthouse in Sacramento's Central City with The Railyards as the preferred location for this new facility.
- Section 2. City Staff are directed to work with the AOC to ensure that the following elements are included in the planning, design and construction of the courthouse: community outreach, sustainability, landmark architecture, vibrant central city, engage the street and lighting.