

Woodstock Report



McHenry County Courthouse | Woodstock, Illinois

April 2012

Introduction



This report provides an observation of existing conditions at the Woodstock Courthouse, and an estimated cost for improvements. We hope these observations will serve as an educational tool that respects the history of the courthouse as well as outlining a preservation plan for the future.

Over the past month we have created new existing floor plans from previous drawings, modifications and changes. Without going and actually measuring the entire building, these will serve to assist developers in accessing the building's potential.

We have evaluated the building existing conditions and have divided the scope of work into two areas.

1. Addressing immediate critical needs to keep the weather and water out and the heat in.
2. Understanding the long term needs of the building to make it an economic success, and how it can contribute to a healthy downtown environment and community image.

As I have stated on several occasions, the previous approach of developing the building on a shoestring budget did not insure its success. In fact, it has prolonged an agonizing downward spiral. It is not an easy building to work with. The floor plan offers little flexibility for mixed uses and the high 1st and 2nd floor elevations with no elevator access are problematic for potential users.

In order to overcome these obstacles, new amenities need to be offered and the building's original character needs to be reenergized by restoring many of its doors, lost architectural details and features. If the building were to be restored to the level of the Opera House, you would have something very special and of far greater value. Its value and importance in the Square would be enhanced dramatically. A long term vision of quality, attention to detail, and the right tenant mix and users will ensure its success for the future.

The continual application of band-aids will only hasten its demise. The mechanical systems are at the end of their useful life and are in need of total replacement. The roof and dome are in a similar state of disrepair. All of the windows need a combination of repair/restoration and replacement. The brick masonry also needs repairs in a variety of places that has been caused by the lack of maintenance on downspouts and gutters.



In our evaluation we have attempted to identify issues that need to be addressed and have estimated those potential costs. Interior costs will be ultimately determined by the uses of the space. However, for purposes of this evaluation, we have projected costs that would restore some of the details, stenciling and wood finishes that once existed in the building. Design parameters for preservation and restoration of the building should be established as an expected standard of development for developers or purchasers of the building.

Having once been a prominent public building, the Courthouse articulates a town square image that is clearly Woodstock. The city has a responsibility to seek proposals that will embrace a concept of restoring the architectural features of the building for future generations.



Water is the single most important cause of undermining a building. Your staff, over the past several months, has made some headway in reducing these problems. Repairs to the downspouts, roof repairs, and making common sense minor repairs have helped the situation. However, other items remain that could endanger public safety. The west parapet wall adjacent to the chimney needs repairs. The south wall cornice of the jail needs repairs below the soffit and at the downspouts. Chunks of bricks are falling off due to spalling from the freezing and thawing of moisture. The brick masonry also needs repairs in a variety of places that has been caused by the lack of maintenance on downspouts and gutters.

The brick masonry on the courthouse has undergone many changes over the years. The brick has been previously stained to provide a more uniform appearance. It has also been coated with a very thin coat of mortar, most of which has worn away. Very thin mortar joints were also applied as a cosmetic make-over which has also disappeared over time. Various other brick patching to replace deteriorated brick has also occurred over the years.

The masonry repairs are of poor quality and the patchwork detracts and downgrades the building appearance. This kind of neglect and insensitivity to basic details sways public opinion that the building is old, ugly, decrepit and should maybe be demolished. Properly restoring the masonry will not only provide a more uniform appearance and a sound exterior, but public perception will dramatically change and improve.

Masonry restoration requires skilled technicians who are experienced in preservation work. Repair work and tuck pointing should not be noticeable if done by experienced and skilled masons. There are only a select few masonry restoration contractors capable of doing this work in Northern Illinois. Some of the existing masonry that was used for infill in previous window openings can be reused for repairs. Even masonry from the chimney could be utilized for repairs. The chimney would no longer be needed for heating and could be reduced in height.

Immediate Critical Needs

We would recommend that the critical areas that are open to the elements and are a source of water infiltration be repaired and restored immediately. Some encompass a sizable area. Sometimes the scope of work should be expanded to include other work in the same area. The cost of hydraulic lifts to reach an area may be more cost effective to do other adjacent incidental work at the same time.



Immediate Critical Needs

Garage

A building with no roof does not enhance the property's development potential. The garage should be removed. It serves no useful purpose anymore. The amount of repair would not be cost effective. The masonry materials and stone should be salvaged for repairs of later courthouse additions. Removal will not only provide easier access for repairs but opening up the area will enhance visually the whole west side.

Even planting grass would be an improvement instead of gravel and concrete. Long-term, planting of landscaping and trees would help improve the appearance around the entire courthouse perimeter.



Long Term Exterior Needs

Courthouse Roof and Dome/Cupola

The original roof appears to have been a metal seamed roof. The current roof is a combination of rolled asphalt over the metal seamed roof with an adhered EPDM around the cupola. It should all be removed to the wood deck and a new standing seam metal roof or an EPDM membrane installed. The roof is barely visible from any direction.

Final roofing material selection should be thoroughly discussed regarding the pros and cons of each and the impact it may have on the use of Historic tax credits and minimizing long term maintenance.



Long Term Exterior Needs

Dome / Cupola

The dome has a flat seam metal roof. We did not have an opportunity to inspect up close what the roofing material consists of. The exterior photos provide some insight as to its condition and the interior shots show the resulting water spots on the inside of the dome. Some of the roof deck will need to be replaced. The metal roofing should be replaced with copper or stainless steel terne for longevity and water tightness.

The wood trim and crown molding should be repaired and replaced in some areas. Replacement materials should be of mahogany or redwood to resist rot. Depending on the extensiveness of the damage other synthetic materials could also be utilized for replacement. In any case, creating a water tight system that can expand and contract with temperature changes is paramount to a long lasting solution. Restoring the cupola's details are crucial to the overall appearance and value of this building. An application of a multi-color paint scheme is extremely important in unifying the entire building.

Although the flagpole historically has been part of the courthouse roof, keeping the base waterproof is a challenge and would require further review.



Critical Immediate Needs

Dome / Cupola / Heavy Timber Structure

There are numerous places where water is infiltrating that will ultimately damage and destroy the heavy timber structural members. This has to be addressed immediately to keep the water out. All open joints and seams must be sealed up as a temporary measure. On the exterior (as a temporary measure) the open joints of the wainscoting should be covered and sealed with aluminum coil stock. Holes in crown molding should also be covered and sealed.

Pigeon droppings are scattered about the attic. Brushing and vacuuming of those areas would be desirable. There are companies that can safely remove the droppings at a reasonable cost.



Critical Immediate Needs

Courthouse Exterior

The front Courthouse stairs have been patched and coated numerous times. Currently they are a liability. They need to be totally stripped down to the original stone surface to see what condition they are in. The stair treads may be worn. However, they may be flipped over for a flatter, straighter surface or even be recut.

Options are available to do a long lasting, maintenance free restoration. It would also be an opportune time to restore the railing system to its original appearance. Fulfilling current code requirements for the railing can be done without destroying the original design intent.



Critical Interior Needs

Courthouse

The critical needs for the interior are leaks in the water supply or waste lines at the 2nd floor of the courthouse. The leaks are in the walls and or in the ceiling and need to be found and repaired. The basement kitchen area in the courthouse has some mold on the drywall at the former boiler room area. It should all be removed

The built up floor in the old boiler room should be removed. Large amounts of moisture and the lack of ventilation in the crawl space has caused lots of problems and has accelerated the deterioration in the plywood deck. From our initial observation, this area could possibly be a location for a new elevator.

The water heater and softener need to be relocated due to the floor condition. If a tenant for the restaurant is found, the decision would need to be made quickly as to where to relocate the equipment.



Critical Interior Needs

Sheriff's House

The Sheriff's House needs a general cleaning to show its potential for perspective tenants or developers . It appears that a secondary roof structure was added on top of the original roof at the rear jail section of the building to probably address some previous water problems. Given the condition of the interior ceiling and wall plaster, the moisture problem was over an extended period of time. Not knowing what the condition of the original roof deck was or is and the structure on top if it, it is difficult to access the cost of removal, repair or reconstruction of the roof deck or the structural elements that frame it. In any case, it should be thoroughly investigated.

The interior finishes of the jail section of the building is in a very deteriorated condition. The plaster ceilings are not code compliant nor are they acceptable for a food establishment. The ceilings of the jail cells are the only thing protecting the restaurant supplies from falling plaster.



Long Term Needs

If the La Petite café stays, the deteriorated plaster ceilings need to be removed. The wire mesh that holds the plaster has rusted away in so many areas. Total removal is the only option. The heat from the refrigeration compressors is also a problem. The current ventilation method is unacceptable. Adding mechanical exhaust with timing devices should be considered. How its done should be aesthetically pleasing and also respect the buildings character.

The basement interior space could be one of the coolest, historic spaces by just removing the partitions, unsightly lighting fixtures and exterior dry wall. Behind the walls are beautiful stone walls that should be re-exposed. The painted wood joists should be stripped to bare wood to expose their patina and character. The concrete floor should be re-exposed and stained. All of its natural assets have been covered up and ignored. The space exemplifies a 1960's type of re-muddling that is a building liability. Taking the space back to its original appearance would be a huge selling point and provide a new opportunity.



Long Term Exterior Needs

Sheriff's House Exterior

If painting the exterior is not completed as part of the immediate critical needs, it should be included in the long term needs. Repainting with an appropriate multi color paint scheme will instantly change perceptions and attitudes about the court house and the café. It's about making good business decisions that can turn a business and building in a positive direction. It will show that the community cares and embraces one of its landmark buildings.

Inappropriate modernization disrespected the building's original window openings. Not matching the original brick downgrades the building's appearance and value. Windows merely become holes in the wall. The original openings should be restored. These are the kind of details, that over time, ruin the public's perception of a building.



Long Term Interior Needs

Courthouse

The lower level of the courthouse restaurant area has an exceptional character in its masonry walls in the original jail area. Unfortunately, the brick is painted and much of its charm is lost. The paint should all be stripped to expose the original brick.

The building's real value is in its original details, finishes and unique features.

The rest of the lower level restaurant has lay-in acoustical ceilings in public dining areas that are totally out of place in this historic structure and should also be removed.



Long Term Needs

Dome / Cupola

Restoration of the dome as well as roof and gutter replacements are essential. In our introduction and in discussing critical needs, we spelled out the needs of preserving a key component of the building's identity. There are no short cuts if the structure is to have a long term future.

Restoring its architectural details and repainting its original colors are all essential. Removing and restoring the roof membrane and gutter system should all be part of a long term solution to keep the building watertight.



Long Term Needs

Windows and Masonry

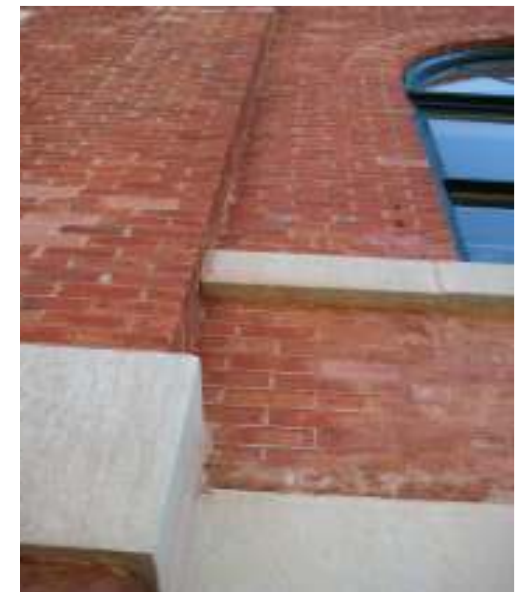
Quite a few of the Courthouse windows have been altered over the years and should be restored to their original appearance. Many of the window muntins are gone in many of the windows sashes. Glass block should be removed and replaced with double hung window units. Some window sashes need to be replaced and others restored.

Windows should also be painted with a multi color paint scheme that would compliment the masonry brick and stone.

Masonry needs to be properly repaired in numerous areas. Previous repairs are of poor quality and contribute to the patched appearance. Better matching brick can be found and the mortar joints should and can be blended to match the adjacent surfaces.

Efflorescence should also be removed where moisture has been a problem. Repairs to the downspouts or total replacement should be considered. Heat tape should also be installed to minimize freezing that causes downspout joints to open up. The use of heat tape is a maintenance item. But it's a better alternative than allowing masonry to spall and fall.

We do not feel that tuck pointing the entire building is necessary or needed. Utilizing a skilled mason contractor knowledgeable in preserving historic masonry structures is essential.



Long Term Needs

The roof gables and roof cornices need to be restored to their original details. Over the years, details, brackets and crown moldings have been stripped off, destroyed, removed, and covered up. The building's real long term value is in restoring those details.

The pediment of the gable has been infilled and looks flat. Old photos depict a recessed pediment that provides shade and shadows to give the details depth. The architectural brackets under the soffit that identified its architectural style and symbolized the origins of our democracy and justice system were trashed in favor of a convenience for maintenance.

Respect for our historic past should include a recognition of the skilled craftsmanship that exemplified a community's sense of pride in its civic building's. Systematically destroying a building's essential artistic details is the greatest form of disrespect to the citizens that sacrificed to get it built. Successful communities today recognize the importance that these type of structures embody. Respect for past can insure a healthy future.



Long Term Needs

Exterior

The Courthouse's color scheme is disjointed and does not enhance or compliment its architectural features. The white Cupola Dome looks like it belongs on another building. A multi-color paint scheme needs to unify all of the building's assets and details.

Bricked in window openings should be opened up and windows installed. The west elevation would also be improved if the overhead utility line were buried.



The Sheriff's House is a prime example of how the lack of color and the dark paint scheme conceals all of the building's primary architectural details and assets. A multi-colored paint scheme would not only restore its original architectural integrity, but would have an immediate positive impact on the entire Square. It would also impact the current café business in a very positive way.



Long Term Needs

Exterior

The west side of the Courthouse is very uninviting and unsightly. The restaurant mechanical equipment is an eyesore and needs to be redone. The fence looks like a stockade.

The West side should be considered for another entrance to the Courthouse. The Courthouse will need an elevator to be accessible and have a future. Installing an elevator next to the west stairway appears to have the best opportunity to access most areas and not destroy architecturally significant interior spaces.

The Sheriff's House accessibility issues are more difficult. A residential lift/elevator may be the only option in accessing most but not all areas.



Long Term Needs

Courthouse Interior

The Courthouse interior has lost much of its original finishes and details. Painted woodwork and a monotone paint scheme have left it uninspiring and feeling like just another tired, old building. Restoring the original wood finishes and stenciling would enhance the building's value and visitor attraction. The building has many visual assets and details that are hidden due to a very inappropriate color scheme.

Unfortunately, the courthouse interior walls inhibit flexibility for many potential users. However, some wall partitions could be removed. In seeking future tenants, the building's character and quality finishes will be its primary attraction.

Some of the ornate vault doors should be retained as part of the building's history and character. The ornate vault doors are an asset and should be celebrated.



Long Term Needs

The second floor has extremely high ceilings. The courtroom ceilings add a special dimension to the space. However, in the rooms to the south, the ceiling height is excessive for most users. Some options could be explored to utilize the volume of space better.

A third floor could easily be added for additional floor space if the costs could be justified relative to the income projections. Flexibility of the room's configurations is also key to potential users.

Finishes are lackluster and could be enhanced significantly by returning to the original wood finishes. The modern wood paneling should be removed, and may reveal the original wood wainscoting. The original wall finishes should be investigated prior to finalizing finishes. Stripping the paint on the walls should reveal a lot more architectural details.



Additional Improvements

Bird Infestation

Removal of a popular pigeon roost is difficult and needs constant attention. Constantly checking weekly, the attic, soffits and cupola for new entry points is a top priority. Making sure openings are closed up and secure is another. Introducing hawks or Peregrine Falcons has been very successful in not only reducing the pigeon population, but removing them all together.

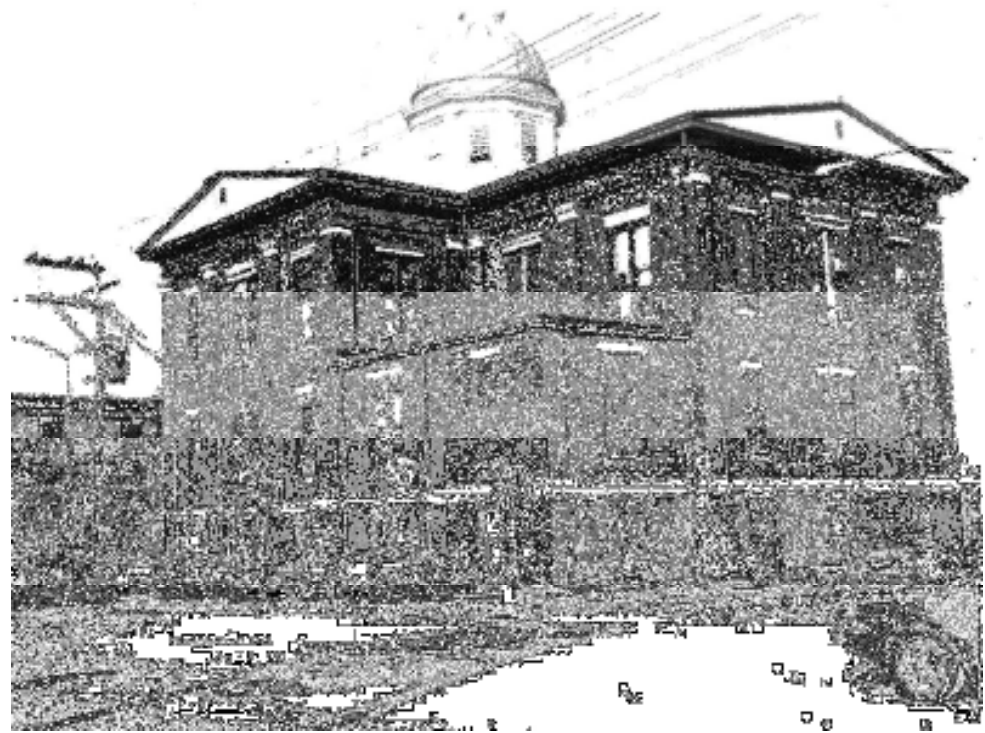
Lead Bearing Walls

We have indicated on the attached plans which walls and partitions could be removed or partially removed to assist in making the building more flexible and user friendly. The building has many bearing walls that cannot be removed and that's part of its history.

Code Issues

The building should be totally sprinklered for fire protection. It will help significantly in addressing code deficiencies. The main open staircase is a concern, but there is an enclosed rated stair in place. There is also a provision in the IBC for Historic Structures that provides the code official some latitude in addressing some code issues that impact historic spaces. Installing other life safety devices can assist in providing some equivalency in addressing most code issues.

Flexibility, using good common sense, and respecting the integrity and value of historic structures goes a long way in resolving many issues. There are many options that can provide a safe environment with today's materials and technology.



Costs

In developing costs, we approached the needs in two ways;

- Repairs Needing Immediate Attention
- Long Term Needed Improvements

We have also summarized the improvements for each. The Courthouse and the Sheriff's House have been broken out individually as well as the interior and exterior work. For long term needs we have included contractor fees, general conditions and a contingency to the sum total of costs.

We have also attached building floor plans and floor plans that show what additional walls could be removed if a proposed user requested it.