

**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE**  
**INTER-OFFICE COMMUNICATION**

**DATE:** February 20, 2017

**TO:** Supervisor Theodore Lipscomb, Sr., Chairman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** George L. Christenson, Milwaukee County Clerk

**SUBJECT:** 2017 Adopted Budget Amendment 1A007: Feasibility of renting Courthouse space as a venue for events, wedding receptions, etc.

**BACKGROUND**

The Milwaukee County 2017 Adopted Budget Amendment 1A007 requested that the Milwaukee County Clerk's Office study the feasibility of renting the Milwaukee County Courthouse Complex as a venue for wedding receptions and other events. The study was to be done in collaboration with the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) – Facilities Management and its findings reported at the March 2017 County Board meeting cycle. Since the County Clerk's Office has no involvement or say with respect to the logistics and operations of the Courthouse Complex, we solicited input from all pertinent entities that do. The County Clerk's Office hereby submits its findings concerning this matter.

**ANALYSIS**

The County Clerk's Office reached out to all relevant departments in studying the feasibility of renting the Courthouse Complex for events, including: DAS – Facilities Management, First Judicial District Courts Administration, Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office (MCSO), and the Office of Risk Management. Each department provided their input and analysis on this matter, as it pertains to their scope of operations and oversight.

Facilities Management

Mr. Jeremy Theis, Director of the Facilities Management Division, conveyed that while his department truly understands the need to review opportunities to increase revenue, it does not believe that renting out spaces within the Courthouse Complex for events and receptions is favorable, considering existing mandated functions and priorities. This conclusion was reached by examining the security and safety measures required, the functional and financial risk involved, and the personnel costs required to support any such event.

Director Theis emphasized that "it is not recommended to host any events after regular business hours unless that specific event has value to the greater community and not a specific attending group." While Facilities acknowledges that the Courthouse Complex already hosts events both large and small during normal business hours, usually held in common areas such as Clas Park or the main corridors of the Courthouse Complex, "these events are large gatherings of public entities and are endorsed by elected officials as worth the logistical and financial effort to support them," Director Theis added. Furthermore, these events require careful coordination between Facilities Management, Circuit Court Administrators,

MCSO Deputies, District Attorney's Office, Office of Emergency Management and many other core tenants that rely on the current security plan.

Director Theis concluded that there are many wonderful locations within Milwaukee County, owned and operated by Milwaukee County, that serve the public with opportunities for wedding events and receptions. Therefore, it may be counter-productive to compete with those locations that are already staffed for support and cost much less to secure.

### Court Operations

Citing safety and security of the visiting public, staff, judicial officers, victims and witnesses as paramount to the facility's interest, both Chief Judge Maxine White and First Judicial District Court Administrator Holly Szablewski expressed opposition to renting Courthouse Complex space for events and weddings. Ms. Szablewski stated that "opening the Courthouse Complex to after-hours rental without significant investment in additional security personnel, weapons screening capabilities, and building area access controls would compromise Courthouse Complex safety and security."

While both Chief Judge White and Ms. Szablewski "understand the County's need and desire to identify potential sources of additional revenue, the Courts are opposed to the renting of Courthouse Complex space for such events."

### Sheriff's Office

MCSO also cited high security risk as one of the reasons they oppose renting the Courthouse Complex for weddings and other events. Captain Douglas Holton, Jr. has advised that large gatherings would make it very difficult for hired security personnel and/or Sheriff's Deputies to closely monitor the entrances, exits, hallways, floors and courtrooms that visitors may attempt to access. "While we [the MCSO] understand the County's desire for additional revenue and the historic Courthouse Complex being a facility the public may want to access for events, we feel that the costs and security risks are too high," Captain Holton stated.

The MCSO estimates that they would need a minimum of two security guards at all entry points for visitors and a minimum of two Deputy Sheriffs to watch over any event. For reference, Captain Holton provided our office with a breakdown of costs associated with securing one entrance with two security guards and three Deputy Sheriffs, which amounts to \$1,229.42 for five hours (please see Attachment 1).

### Office of Risk Management

The Office of Risk Management agreed with the position of the Courts, the MCSO, and Facilities Management in that the security and safety of the patrons, employees, and visiting public is the top priority of the Courthouse Complex. Ms. Amy Pechacek, Director of Risk Management, conveyed that "any potential financial benefit from rental or usage fees from this proposal is outweighed by the level of exposure and liability the County would assume from this practice."

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the expert opinions gathered from DAS – Facilities Management, First Judicial District Courts Administration, MCSO, and the Office of Risk Management, it is our recommendation that the costs as

well as inherent security risks associated with having large crowds in a secure facility such as the Courthouse Complex outweigh the potential benefits in form of additional revenue and promotion of County services. Although quite striking and architecturally pleasing, Milwaukee County Courthouse Complex is a secure facility and as such it is not suitable to host large gatherings such as wedding receptions.



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**George L. Christenson**  
Milwaukee County Clerk

Attachment 1: Security Cost Breakdown Provided by the Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office

Cc: Supervisor Peggy West, Chairwoman, Committee on Finance and Audit  
Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors  
Jeremy Theis, Director, Facilities Management Division  
Holly Szablewski, Court Administrator, 1<sup>st</sup> Judicial District of Wisconsin  
Captain Douglas Holton, Jr., Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office  
Amy Pechacek, Director, Risk Management  
Gary Waszak, Facilities Maintenance Manager