

June 27, 2022

Teton County Commissioners via hand-delivery

Dear Commissioners,

We are writing this letter out of concern for the safety and well-being of the occupants of the Teton County Courthouse. As you know, the seismic study performed on the courthouse concludes that the building was not originally designed, detailed or constructed to account for seismic effects. The building is non-conforming in seventeen categories of the Life Safety Basic Configuration Checklist. This is of great concern. It not only poses a potentially catastrophic health and safety risk to the building's occupants, it presents a serious risk to the continuity of our County's essential governmental services. A building failure means an extensive disruption, if not halt, to the operations of our County's Circuit Court, Clerk of Circuit Court, Clerk of District Court, District Court, and the Sheriff's Department. A disruption to each of these essential governmental services, particularly the Sheriff's Department, presents a broader risk to our community. The Sheriff's Department plays a critical role in our County's disaster response. In the event of an earthquake and associated building failure, the Sheriff's personnel that would normally be our first responders would be part of the disaster and unable to assist others. The study was not able to determine what magnitude this would take which adds to our concerns.

It is of great concern to learn that the safety and welfare of the courts, their staff, the public, jurors who may be required to be here based on their civil duty, and the sheriff's office appear to be a low priority. It is imperative that action is taken quickly. We know you have all reviewed the report and are familiar with its contents so restating all of its particular findings seems unnecessary. However, a few important points should be emphasized. KL&A determined that the building failed to meet the ASCE Standard 41-13, 2.3.1.3, *Life Safety Structural Performance Level (S-3)*. This is the minimum standard to retain a margin of safety against the onset of partial or total collapse. As a result, they recommended that *"the 911 IT infrastructure and all essential components of the Sheriff's office relocate to a different facility to ensure these elements remain fully operational throughout a major event."* The bottom line is if we have a considerable seismic event, the Teton County Courthouse is at risk of collapse and could significantly injure or kill its occupants.

In addition, planning was underway to construct security upgrades such as blast and ballistic resistant glazing, but that had to be cancelled because the building is unable to support the added weight of these upgrades. Also, other security enhancements had to be cancelled such as better surveillance cameras, a secure lobby entrance, a secure employee entrance and upgraded notification and alerting systems. Currently, the regular occupants of the building and particularly the court security team is at high risk due to the lack of these much-needed upgrades.

It appears the most effective way to ensure the continuity of our operations is to build a structure east of the administration building that could temporarily house the sheriff's department and the court offices. In addition within that structure, a small courtroom should be built that can be used for most proceedings that don't require many people to attend. The District

and Circuit Court could alternate using the Hansen Courthouse for jury trials. It would not be ideal, but it seems to be the best solution while the old building is being torn down and the new one is erected. Eventually, the small courtroom could be converted into other offices.

Wyoming Statute §18-2-103 requires “[e]ach county shall provide and maintain a suitable courthouse, jail and other necessary county buildings.” Based on the seismic study results the board is required to act. The purpose of this letter is to request that you act immediately in order to ensure the safety of the occupants of the courthouse, sheriff’s office and the public. A delay in dealing with this issue could have catastrophic consequences. Please know we appreciate your dedication to public service and understand you all have many issues before you to handle. This one however, is of the utmost importance. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.


Sincerely,



Melissa M. Owens, District Court Judge



Anne Sutton, District Court Clerk




James L. Radda, Circuit Court Judge



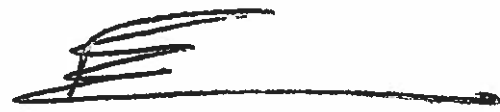
Erin Munk, Circuit Court Clerk



Matthew Carr, Teton County Sheriff



Mike Crook, Head of Courthouse Security



Erin E. Weisman,
Teton County and Prosecuting Attorney