

# COLORADO COUNTY COURTHOUSE MASTER PLAN

Columbus, Texas



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VA Project No: 013-07  
September 14, 2007

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## COLORADO COUNTY COURTHOUSE MASTER PLAN

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **BACKGROUND**

After a portion of the historic plaster ceiling collapsed unexpectedly in the District Courtroom on May 30, 2006, Colorado County contracted with Drymalla Construction, a local contractor, to stabilize the remaining ceiling. A project team consisting of Volz & Associates, Inc., Cutright-Allen Architects, and Sparks Engineering, Inc. was then hired to assess the damage, make recommendations for repair or replacement, and assist the County in pursuing a Texas Preservation Trust Fund grant from the Texas Historical Commission.

Initial field work was conducted by John Volz and Tere O'Connell of Volz & Associates, Pat Sparks and Clint Etzel of Sparks Engineering, and Brad Cutright and Kenneth Miksch of Cutright-Allen Architects on July 18, 2006. Additional field work occurred on August 30, 2006 after installation of scaffolding in the courtroom. Based on the information collected, a restoration procedure was developed and several anchoring devices were mocked up at the ceiling. After the Texas Historical Commission determined that the Courthouse was not eligible for a Texas Preservation Trust Fund grant, the County elected to continue with the restoration of the ceiling and fully fund the work.

Drawings and specifications were then developed by the project team in coordination with the Texas Historical Commission. The ceiling restoration project was issued for bidding in November 2006, and Drymalla Construction was selected as the general contractor. Restoration work on the ceiling began in January, 2007 and was completed in June. The total construction cost for the work was \$245,342.00. Volz & Associates noted roof leaks throughout the course of the project and the contractor expressed concern for the condition of the electrical system.

Volz & Associates was contracted to prepare a general condition assessment of the building, prioritized recommendations for repairs and an opinion of probable costs. Areas requiring immediate attention included the roof, windows, and electrical system. Based on the findings of that investigation, the County elected to hire Volz & Associates to prepare a full Master Plan, and pursue funding through the Texas Courthouse Preservation Program as administered by the Texas Historical Commission.

### **GOALS AND PURPOSE**

This document renders a practical outline of existing needs of the Colorado County Courthouse and surrounding site. During the course of this Master Plan project, the building's structural, mechanical, architectural, accessibility, and life safety needs have been identified and analyzed. Input from those who use the building on a daily or weekly basis has been compiled in an effort to make this report useful for making decisions as the County

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **COLORADO COUNTY COURTHOUSE MASTER PLAN**

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continues to grow over the next ten years. The Master Plan is not intended as a rigid set of instructions to be followed, but as a general guideline the County can use to make informed decisions regarding the Courthouse and grounds.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Field measurement of the courthouse was undertaken by Chris Hutson and Rob Ward of Volz & Associates during multiple site visits in July and August 2007 in order to prepare CADD drawings of the building.

The existing conditions were documented during site visits on August 14th and 15th, 2007 and August 21st and 22nd, 2007. CADD floor plans and Historic American Building Survey (HABS) elevations provided the base for recordation of the condition assessment. Additional field measurements and notations were taken as necessary for verification and to determine quantities and conditions of original and existing materials.

Sparks Engineering, Inc. visited the Courthouse to determine its structural condition, note deficiencies, and recommend solutions. HMG & Associates, Inc. analyzed the building's mechanical, electrical, plumbing and alarm systems to ascertain existing conditions, note code violations, and recommend solutions.

Observations by Volz & Associates are based on visual inspections from all available access points. In addition, 50x binoculars and telephoto photography were used to document areas on the exterior that were too high to be seen clearly from the ground. Investigation did not include asbestos or lead paint sampling and analysis. A hazardous materials survey of the Courthouse will need to be performed by a licensed investigating firm prior to any work being performed in accordance with state law.

### **GENERAL CONCLUSIONS**

In general, the Courthouse was found to be in fair condition considering the age and history of the structure. However, the existing clay tile roof system and copper dome have multiple active leaks that are causing damage to historic interior finishes, including the newly restored courtroom ceiling. The Classically-detailed copper cornice also has many holes and open joints that are allowing water into the structure. These issues must be addressed before any additional work can be undertaken.

Other significant problems identified include the existing electrical system, which has several serious deficiencies in the basement and attic spaces that are potential fire hazards. In addition, many of the historic wood windows are in extremely poor condition and need significant repair if they are to be saved.

Additional problems include deteriorated masonry and mortar joints, heavily stained brick and limestone, minor structural cracking, worn and/or water-damaged interior finishes, inadequate patches and repairs from previous renovations, and inadequate electrical and mechanical and plumbing systems. Some evidence of termite damage and past activity was observed in the northeast corner of the first floor. A complete summary of the Courthouse and surrounding site follows with graphic interpretation and photographic references for illustration of specific problems or conditions. Building code compliance, accessibility compliance, structural analysis and MEP (mechanical, electrical, and plumbing) analysis are discussed in subsequent chapters.

# RESTORATION PROGRAM

## COLORADO COUNTY COURTHOUSE MASTER PLAN

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## RESTORATION PROGRAM

### INTRODUCTION:

The preceding chapters have defined the various physical defects, regulatory requirements and owner's needs that will need to be addressed during the restoration of the Colorado County Courthouse. A successful preservation project requires a delicate balance between the functional requirements of the owner's program and the building needs. This must be accomplished within the framework of the existing building codes, while preserving the historical integrity of the building. This chapter outlines the scope of work necessary to achieve that balance and includes graphic illustrations of suggested modifications to the Courthouse.

### RESTORATION DATE:

Historic structures evolve over time as they are used by their occupants. When making the decision to restore a historic building, it is important to establish a specific date or time period to use as a reference for making decisions. Choosing a restoration date provides a common frame of reference and prevents inaccurate decisions.

The most dramatic change in the courthouse occurred when the original tower and roof structure were toppled by a hurricane in 1909. The reconstruction design by architect Frank S. Glover altered the exterior from a second empire style to its current classical revival form. On the interior, the most significant change occurred in the District Courtroom. Based on the 1890 specifications the original District Courtroom ceiling was tongue and groove cypress with a wood cornice around the perimeter. Glover's replacement ceiling was a much more ornate decorative plaster composition highlighted by a large stained glass dome. For the restoration of the Courthouse, we suggest establishing a restoration date of 1910, that will showcase the building at the zenith of its interior embellishment.

### RESTORATION SUMMARY:

The initial phase of work on the Colorado County Courthouse will focus on the repair of the roof and copper dome to stop ongoing roof leaks and water damage to interior walls and ceilings. The last major roof work was completed almost 26 years ago. Immediate intervention is required to prevent further deterioration the building before additional repairs and restoration can commence.

The second phase of work will include full interior and exterior restoration of the building. The most significant elements of the restoration program include removal of two one-story



Historic Photo 6: Colorado County Courthouse, c. 1900, photographed from the northwest corner of the square (Original photograph in Big Pictures Box 1 File 21)

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Date: c 1900

Description: B&W photo

Source: Nesbitt Memorial Library - Columbus TX

Catalog No.: 101-01792

Photographer: unknown

Notations: none on front

Comments: view is from northeast corner  
shows original tower, roof form, cornice, clock face, and roof cresting  
shows original balcony railings at porches  
shows semi-circular drive at east side (possibly under construction)