



The City of
Colonial Heights, Virginia

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City of Colonial Heights Unveils Plans for New Municipal Courthouse

The Colonial Heights Mayor and City Council have formally approved the development plans and building schematics for a new Municipal Courthouse that has been in discussion for most of the past ten years.

The Council approved moving forward with the project after receiving a detailed presentation at their Work Session last night on the courthouse plans and schematics as recommended by building and land use committees, as well as city staff

“This is an exciting and historic project that will serve generations of Colonial Heights citizens,” said Colonial Heights Mayor Scott Davis. “We are pleased to not only now have the support of City Council, but to also have the unilateral support of the 12th Circuit judiciary and essentially all other stakeholders involved with our plans.”

Current plans are for the construction of a two-story building with 65,000 total square feet, which will more than triple the size of the existing courthouse. The design will provide significant enhancements in all existing operations, and will include construction of the city’s first Juvenile and Domestic Relations courtroom. The plans were developed with the input of all current courthouse occupants – which includes the Circuit Court, General District Court, Court Clerks, Commonwealth Attorney, Sheriff and Corrections Services - and is anticipated to provide more than enough space for all courthouse needs for the next 30 years.

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After much discussion over most of the past decade, the City Council ultimately decided last October to build the new courthouse on property acquired by the city many years prior at 231 Chesterfield Avenue, the former site of the Colonial Heights Baptist Church.

Subsequent to this decision, the Council created two advisory groups to help guide the design and development of the project: *Oversight Advisory/Building Committee* and the *Southern Gateway Land Use Planning Committee*, providing effective opportunities for a wide range of input on the project from all interested parties.

The *Building Committee*, charged with guiding the specific design and construction of the courthouse building, is co-chaired by Mayor Davis and the Hon. Herbert C. Gill Jr., Presiding Judge, 12th Judicial Circuit of Virginia; and includes Colonial Heights Sheriff Todd Wilson, City Manager Tom Mattis, and City Engineer Chuck Henley. After a series of lengthy and detailed deliberations on all design elements and needs for the courthouse - including a review of the project with all judges of the 12th Judicial Court - the *Building Committee* unanimously agreed on the plan recommended to City Council.

One of the primary objectives for the new courthouse is to appropriately address overall safety, security, and access to the building. Since the construction of the current courthouse more than 30 years ago, the requirements and expectations for security and access to the courts and courts facilities has changed dramatically.

“While the current courthouse has served the needs our citizens for many years, times have changed significantly in terms of courthouse security,” said Sheriff Wilson. “The new courthouse will not only provide enhanced security and access for citizens and visitors, but will also create a safer environment for my deputies and all courthouse staff.”

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The *Land Use Planning Committee* includes a wide-range of citizens and business owners and is co-chaired by Vice-Mayor Betsy Luck and Councilmember Milton Freeland. Its role has been to focus on development aesthetics and “big picture issues” that go beyond just the courthouse building; helping the Council to form the broader vision for redevelopment of this area of the city and the southern Boulevard corridor, with the courthouse serving as its cornerstone.

The new Colonial Heights Courthouse will generally follow a “neo-classical” design with a bricked exterior and columned porticos. A predominant building feature will include a “lighthouse-design” cupola, creating great visibility for the courthouse as a local landmark. The project will also include extensive landscaping with native plantings and a pedestrian-friendly courtyard.

“We are very pleased with the general development plans for the property and the traditional design of the courthouse,” said Vice-Mayor Luck. “We believe it will not only fit with the historic character of the neighborhood, but will also create enhanced re-development opportunities for businesses along the Boulevard.”

The plans and design for the courthouse have been developed consistent with a conceptual analysis completed by Moseley Architects in September, 2010. That analysis had set the estimated construction cost for new courthouse designed to meet the city’s needs at approximately \$13.5M .

Total project costs, not including costs for the land, were estimated at \$18.1M. The recommended plan is believed to be affordable within these general cost parameters.

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“We continue to review a variety of options for financing this project, but have not yet determined a specific plan,” said City Manager Tom Mattis. “Once we have agreed on a maximum guaranteed price with the building contractor, we will be able to accurately assess the exact financial impact. It is the expressed desire of the City Council, however, that direct costs to Colonial Heights homeowners be as minimal as possible.”

The Council also authorized the staff to begin negotiations with Kenbridge Construction of Kenbridge, Virginia on an agreement to provide general contractor-at-risk services that will facilitate the construction project. The current schedule calls for final plans and cost estimates to be complete by the end of the calendar year, with an anticipated project ground-breaking by Spring, 2012 and project completion by Summer, 2013.

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