This article is to inform the people of Pulaski County as to the state of the County Courthouse, where it falls in compliance with building and safety codes, Federal and State ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliance mandates, and structural integrity.

A year ago the County invited structural engineers to come and inspect the building, its foundation, stairwells, entryways, retention walls and stone exterior. At that time we were informed that the building was in a state of deterioration and several locations were pointed out as being damaged and in need of repair. These sections of the building can be easily seen once pointed out and include leaning walls and stairways, cracks in stone, and shifting landings. As the stairs and walls continue to shift, basement doors become extremely difficult to open and close. The problem these damaged areas present is that water continues to get inside and the freezing and thawing are moving everything. As the year progressed we had other inspections from the State Fire Marshall to HVAC engineers and a really good picture was developed as far as repairs and building needs. A few months ago another engineering team came in and did a much more comprehensive evaluation, which highlighted not only the known issues but also others not previously noted.

The needs of the building from a structural perspective are:

1. Tuck-pointing and crack repair building wide
2. Disassembly of entry stairs and landings, supporting them, adding drainage, and reassembly.
3. Disassembly of perimeter wall, adding drainage, and reassembly
4. Repair of zinc coated roof drains and metalwork
5. Re-pouring sidewalks and broken stairs
6. Excavating below ground level and waterproofing building
7. Re-support of building attic in 70+ locations

This was a list of necessary repairs, with the attic repairs being classified as emergency due to its current state. As it sits the attic is being supported only by the attic floor. A heavy snow or 70 mph winds could cause it to collapse. This is not an unsubstantiated claim but a professional structural engineer’s assessment. It is within the scope of the current suggested building project to make all of these changes to ensure safety and continued building longevity.

There is some minor opposition voiced concerning construction of an addition to the current courthouse. I will attempt to pass on information as to why this addition is not only needed but required, the problems it solves, and the laws and regulations it will bring our county into compliance with.

First, did you know there is no fire suppression system in your Courthouse? This building was built in 1897 and for over one hundred years has stood as an icon for our county. Currently without a fire suppression system, your building, your history is at risk. When the courthouse was built it cost the taxpayers of Pulaski County $50,000.00 but to replace it today would be 10’s of millions. Being a public building, a fire suppression system not only protects it and the records it holds, but also the lives of the public inside, as well as loved ones who work here every day. Next to the suppression system, the only smoke detectors are three battery operated residential detectors located in the stairwells, with no connectivity to local emergency response. If you team that with the single push button fire alarm in the basement, you have a disaster waiting to happen. If there is a fire in the Auditors office that spreads to the hallway, anyone upstairs could be trapped and not be able to get out safely.

Second, did you know that your courthouse is one of the few left without a secure single point of entry? This means there is no control of people or items being brought into the building. In this day and age security and safety has become a major concern and it is the thought of the Commissioners and Council to increase security to give the public a safe environment to conduct business, and court. The courts are close to mandating secure single points of entry in every courthouse already and with no security presence, or monitoring system we are already at a disadvantage.

Third, did you know there are clean air requirements for public buildings? Public buildings are required to have air circulation mixed with clean outside air. The county jail is up to these standards and the inmates enjoy an influx of fresh air through their heating and cooling system. That is not the case in your courthouse. We have a boiler baseboard heat system but no air conditioning in most of the courthouse so air becomes stagnant, which promotes mold and other bacteria.

Fourth, did you know that we are required by federal law to provide accessibility to those individuals with disabilities? Some of the county’s federal funding is dependent on it. This doesn’t simply mean the ability to get in the door. This means specific measurements for ramp angles and widths, door widths and knob types, bathroom and elevator sizes, countertop heights, etc. The elevator we currently have is obsolete and they no longer make replacement parts for it, and that’s beside the fact it is too small and has the wrong type of controls for ADA compliance. The exterior doors are the same way, obsolete.

The courthouse can be repaired but due to its age, historical status, and design it cannot be brought up to code without stripping the inside and rebuilding it. In comparison Tippecanoe County recently remodeled their courthouse to bring it up to date with a cost of near fifteen million dollars ($15,000,000.00) which only covered renovation and updates. Pulaski County has the ability to revamp its government center, and with an addition cover all building codes, safety measures, and compliance mandates all for a fraction of what Tippecanoe County spent. Issues also covered are additional parking, a usable county square, energy savings through more efficient systems and lighting which all lower the cost of operating the government building. This isn’t an issue about whether or not to remodel a building. This is an issue where the county is not compliant with current laws and must be corrected.

This also isn’t a project that was rushed into, or being rushed through. Many months of inspection, research, professional assessment, and planning has been completed before the first decision was made. In actuality, the very first assessment started three years ago and since that time the project has been in the forefront of discussions with both the Commissioners and Council. They have seen multiple presentations concerning all of the issues, been involved in debate as the facts were presented, photographic proof shared and professional assessments made available.

If you have been to the courthouse recently you have noticed crumbling and cracked stairwells, deteriorating walls, and floors that are slowly falling apart and those are the minor problems. I invite anyone to call me for more information, schedule a time to do a walkthrough and see these needs for themselves. I am happy to answer any questions you have so you can better understand why this is being done.