

# THE FEDERAL COURTHOUSE SERVES AS A SYMBOL OF JUSTICE

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WHETHER A STAND-ALONE OR MULTI-USE BUILDING, NEW OR OLD, LOCATED IN A PARKLIKE SETTING OR IN THE HEART OF DOWNTOWN, THE FEDERAL COURTHOUSE IS A PHYSICAL EMBODIMENT OF JUSTICE AND THE RULE OF LAW. EACH OF THE NATION'S 94 FEDERAL JUDICIAL DISTRICTS IS HOME TO MORE THAN ONE FEDERAL COURTHOUSE. THESE 800 COURTHOUSES TAKE UP ABOUT 40 MILLION SQUARE FEET OF SPACE. MANY PEOPLE WHO VISIT THE FEDERAL JUDICIAL BRANCH'S HOME IN THEIR OWN CITY MAY NOT REALIZE THAT THE JUDICIARY IS NOT THE OWNER OF THE COURTHOUSE BUT MERELY A TENANT.

The General Services Administration (GSA), an agency of the executive branch, functions as the landlord for much of the real property owned by the U.S. government. Congress intended that the GSA work much like a private-sector firm, constructing and maintaining buildings and collecting rent for its real property and management services.

Congress provides funds annually for the judiciary to pay rent and other fees to the GSA for the courthouse space the courts use. In fact, almost 20 percent of the judiciary's annual budget goes to pay rent. However, the GSA doesn't own all the buildings rented by the judiciary. Some buildings, or parts of buildings, are privately owned and leased to the GSA, then made available to the courts.

The Judicial Conference of the United States—and especially its Space and Facilities Committee—sets priorities for building new courthouses and refurbishing old ones. The Judicial Conference then conveys these priorities both to the GSA and to Congress. In turn, the GSA requests funding for the projects as part of the President's annual budget, and Congress appropriates funds for GSA-supervised construction or renovation projects. For example, funding recently has been provided for the construction of much-needed new courthouses in San Diego and Bakersfield, Calif.; Austin, Texas; and Billings, Mont.

Court staff in each federal district and circuit, together with staff from the Space and Facilities Committee, works with the GSA on developing and supervising construction and renovation projects. The court staff also arranges for improvements in each building, including plumbing or electrical repair, roofing repairs, and cyclical maintenance such as painting and heavy-duty cleaning.

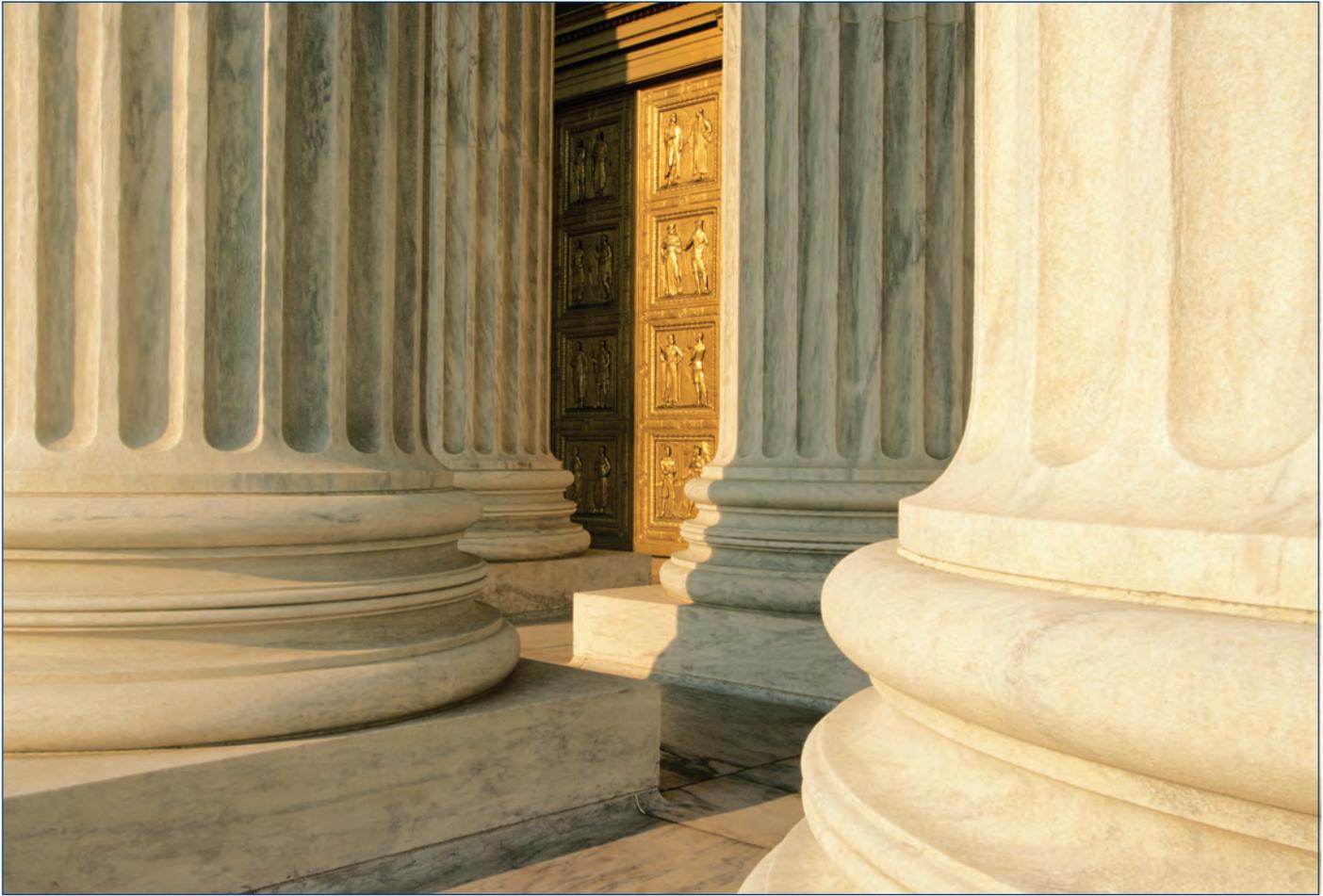
The Space and Facilities Committee also works closely with the GSA to render many existing facilities more envi-

ronmentally friendly and to increase their efficiency. Retrofitting older buildings to be more eco-friendly not only saves money through decreased energy costs but also provides much-needed jobs.

New construction, rehabilitation, and renovation of courthouse buildings require coordination among local court staff, the Space and Facilities Committee, the GSA, and the project's architects and engineers. Each project requires a unique approach that considers the needs of the particular court and the local community it serves. At the outset of a courthouse project, the local court has one of five votes in selecting the design architect.

In the past, local courts had occasionally experienced difficulty making their voices heard during the design process. The judiciary worked diligently with the GSA to address this problem. Now, the judge who is part of the design selection team has assistance from the local court's building expert and the circuit's architect and also has input from experts at the Judicial Conference's Space and Facilities Committee.

Architects must design courthouses primarily from the inside out; they must first determine the operational needs of the court and then consider the building's architectural significance. Yet, federal courthouses, which are built to provide a century of service, are also enduring symbols of the law. The exterior of the courthouse must be designed to convey the solemnity and importance of the proceedings within. In 2008, the American Institute of Architects celebrated the architecture of four federal courthouses in its publication *Justice Facilities Review*; the buildings that won acclaim were the courthouses in Alpine, Texas, and Orlando, Fla.; the courthouse annex in Little Rock, Ark.; and the federal building in Wheeling, W. Va. The Space



and Facilities Committee is proud of the architectural excellence of many of the federal courthouses across the United States.

The committee reviews, monitors, and proposes to the Judicial Conference policies regarding the courts' space needs. The committee led the review of and approved policy revisions for the *U.S. Courts Design Guide*, the primary design and policy document for construction and renovation work.

The committee uses a methodology called asset management planning to develop long-range facilities plans for the judiciary. These plans analyze the judiciary's current and future needs for space, considering trends in caseloads in its analysis. The asset management planning process is crucial to overall planning, because it assesses facilities holistically, identifies new construction and renovation projects, considers specific housing strategies, and determines the best way to meet current and future operational needs. The objective of the Space and Facilities Committee is to help the judiciary achieve the best possible value for every dollar spent.

The judiciary has made a major effort in recent years to control annual increases in rent. The effort to control expenses is being carried out, in part, by including circuit judicial councils in budgetary decisions. Each circuit executive's office has a significant role in working with the circuit judicial council's judges to manage that circuit's

rent budget.

The judiciary is also seeking to improve the way to validate and verify the actual square footage of the space that is used in each building and is looking for better ways of determining the rental value of each location's square footage. The rental value varies by city, region, and age of the building, among other factors. Working together with the GSA, the judiciary has achieved significant savings in rental expenses by renegotiating the price per square foot for buildings in some cities and regions.

The Space and Facilities Committee coordinates its work with other Judicial Conference committees, such as the Committees on Judicial Security, Information Technology, Court Administration and Case Management, and the Budget. In this way, the Space and Facilities Committee works to ensure that the federal courthouse remains an integral symbol of justice and the rule of law. **TFL**

*Chief U.S. District Judge Joseph F. Bataillon of the District of Nebraska chairs the Space and Facilities Committee of the Judicial Conference of the United States.*

