



OFFICE OF THE

# *City Court of Lafayette*

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City Court of Lafayette

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March 8, 2023

Mr. Josh Guillory  
Mayor-President  
City of Lafayette, Parish of Lafayette  
705 West University Avenue  
Lafayette, LA 70502

Mr. Glenn Lazard  
Chairman, Lafayette City Council  
705 West University Avenue  
Lafayette, LA 70502

Mr. Josh Carlson  
Chairman, Lafayette Parish Council  
705 West University Avenue  
Lafayette, LA 70502

Re: Possible Relocation of Lafayette City Court  
and Lafayette City Marshal

Dear Mayor-President Guillory, Chairman Lazard, and Chairman Carlson:

This letter follows the Court's telephone conversation with LCG attorney, Greg Logan on March 7, and in discussions that same day during the City Council meeting concerning the potential relocation of the Lafayette City Courthouse. Due to the numerous news stories and inquiries prompted by the announcement of a proposed HUD financed public-private partnership utilizing the existing courthouse property, we want to document the chronology of events leading to this point and confirm the fundamental concerns that should be addressed in making any such decision.

On Tuesday afternoon, February 28, a press release was issued by the Administrative Office of Lafayette Consolidated Government (“Mayor-President”), which reported that the Mayor-President planned on relocating the City Court and City Marshal from the present City Court building to a different, yet to be determined site, in order to accommodate a privately owned 208-residential unit apartment complex with a city-owned parking garage. It must be unequivocally understood that prior to this release, we had no notification, except rumors, of this proposal. We shortly thereafter learned that this proposed agreement has not been approved by the City or Parish Councils and it appears that the Councils learned of this proposal in the same fashion as the Court and the City Marshal.

First, and foremost, we believe that the current city court building is, and will for several decades more, remain perfectly suitable for the public purpose that it was constructed, a courthouse. The building housing the City Court and the City Marshal has served the City and Parish of Lafayette since 1966, with a major renovation in 1998. The building is in generally good repair. The current assessed value of the building exceeds \$4 million. You may remember that together we put a new roof on the building (2014) and installed a new HVAC system (2019) at a cost over \$2 million.

We are aware that the City Council has the authority to declare the property no longer needed for its intended public purpose and relocate the City Court, by simply duly and validly adopting an Ordinance. Further, we are confident that you are aware that the Court can only be relocated to facilities which are suitable for the operations of the Court and Marshal, and suitably convenient for the taxpayers and citizens who utilize the City Court for both criminal and civil legal matters every day. We are not aware of any legal authority for the Mayor-President, in his sole discretion, to lease, sell, or exchange the publicly dedicated City Court location without approval of the City Council, and possibly the Parish Council. Since the Parish Council funds, in part, the Marshal’s and City Court’s operations (which would presumably include the expenses of moving), the Parish Council would seemingly also have to appropriate additional funds for any relocation, again by Ordinance, duly and validly adopted.

We do not question the desire of some to bring a residential development for mixed-income residents and retail businesses to downtown Lafayette or the need for additional parking that can be used day and night. Though the City Court has not initiated this plan to move and redesign our facilities, we recognize that it does have the potential benefit of providing an opportunity for the leaders of this

community and court to collaborate on the development of downtown and a new City Justice Complex. An improved downtown, coupled with State-of-the-art facilities for the Court, Marshal, Prosecutors and Public Defenders but most importantly, the citizen-taxpayers could be a national model for the revitalization of downtown and administration of justice.

If the Councils agree that this relocation of the City Court and Marshal is in the best interests of the taxpayer-citizens of the City and Parish, then we look forward to the opportunity to cooperate to the fullest degree possible in making this move. If that be the case, simple prudence dictates our involvement in the process of selecting the proposed City Court site and designing the new building, parking lot, and supporting facilities.

On February 24, 2022, the Court met with City-Parish Attorney Greg Logan and Mayor-President Guillory at City Hall. Marshal Thomas was not included in the meeting by the Administration. During this meeting, the Court was informed that LCG was interested in moving the City Court because the property was needed to remedy downtown drainage issues. There was no mention made of a potential public-private development for residential and parking facilities. The War Memorial Buildings, located on the corner of Pinhook and Jefferson Street, was mentioned as a possible site for the Court's relocation. The Court informed Mr. Logan and Mayor-President Guillory that, in fact, The War Memorial Buildings might well be a suitable site for relocation, assuming that the proper new construction was done.

On April 21, 2022, the Court received an email from Mr. Logan which notified the Court that those plans were no longer feasible, and that the Court would be kept informed as matters progressed. That email was the last communication received by the Court from the Mayor/President's office on the subject. If it were an option, we continue to believe that this site would make a suitable location for the City Court but only if the buildings currently located thereon are demolished and a suitable complex can be constructed in its place. However, in the Court's recent conversations with Mr. Logan, and subsequent conversations with some council members, it was confirmed that demolition and use of The War Memorial buildings is not a consideration and thus no longer an option to be a new site for the City Court.

More recently, it came to the Court's attention that the Mayor-President may want to relocate the Court and Marshal to the building located at 1010 Lafayette St., the so-called 1010 Building. The Court and Marshal are very familiar with that

building and do not believe that this would be a suitable facility for the Court's needs. This Parish owned building has structural, parking and security issues that we believe cannot be addressed by simple patch work repairs and will recreate the problems that the 15<sup>th</sup> JDC is experiencing with the parish courthouse, and further compound the legal issues associated with the millage that is dedicated to the support of the "Lafayette Parish Courthouse Complex."

For the reasons previously listed, the 1010 Building is woefully deficient. However, there are several additional reasons why the 1010 Building is unsuitable for use as a courthouse: insufficient elevator capacity, ADA compliant accessibility and insufficiently secure parking for the judges, staff, public and the Marshal's units. Because of the size of the building, the three currently necessary courtrooms (without regard to planning for future growth) would have to be located on separate floors, causing additional security and personnel problems and unnecessary confusion for the citizens called to court.

Approximately 55,000 taxpaying citizens from Lafayette Parish and other areas come to the City Court yearly. Given the vehicular and pedestrian traffic caused by the proximity of the Sheriff's Office and District Court, the addition of these 55,000 people would create even more congestion and chaos in the area than currently exists.

In short, the 1010 Building would need to be substantially rebuilt (if not razed) and would still not be suitable for the City Court or the citizens it serves. Unlike the current City Court building, the parish government building located at 1010 Lafayette St., in its long-standing deplorable condition, seems unsuitable for its public purpose. In truth, many may conclude it may make more sense for the Parish Council to sell it to a private developer for the production of a mixed residential and commercial facility downtown rather than demolishing the existing City Court Building much less investing more taxpayer funds into patchwork repairs of the 1010 parish building.

During the same telephone conversation, Mr. Logan assured the Court that neither the War Memorial Building nor the 1010 Building were appropriate sites. He further stated that a suitable "green field" location was being sought but that no such location had yet been identified. This statement was also confirmed by the Mayor/President in his presentation to the Council at its meeting on March 7, 2023, where he too indicated that no location has been identified as a suitable site for relocation of the court. We and it appears from the council meeting, you the council, concur that no suitable location is currently available.


In summary, while we believe that a relocation of the City Court is unnecessary, our most essential plea is that, if the Councils deem it in the best interest of the citizens and taxpayers of this City and Parish, the Court and Marshal wholeheartedly accept the invitation of the Mayor/President, Mr. Logan and the council members to be a part of the discussion, planning and construction of any new City Court location and building. Of course, the Marshal, who is responsible for courthouse security, must oversee the design of the building security.

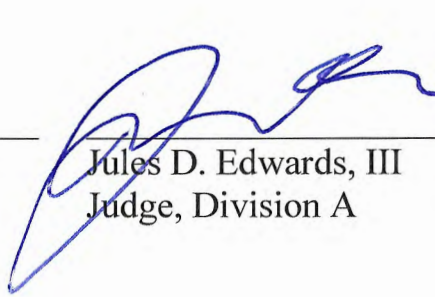
In addition to participation by the Court and Marshal, we urge each of you and the Councils to consult the National Center for State Courts (“NCSC”) to assist in the evaluation of any location being considered for the City Court. The NCSC is the nationally recognized authority on the design, planning, security concerns and building of state courthouses and courthouses for courts of limited jurisdiction, like the Lafayette City Court.

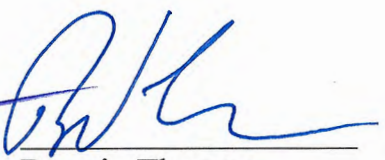
Finally, we fully agree with the words of the Mayor/President: “We look forward to continue working with them and to make sure that all of their needs are satisfied because we have a public interest in that, we also have a duty to make sure our facilities are up and running safely...as the process works itself out, ... all of these needs will be addressed.”

If any of you, or any of your fellow Council Members, have any questions of us, as always, you need merely to call us.

Respectfully,

  
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Douglas J. Saloom  
Chief Judge  
Judge, Division B

  
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Jules D. Edwards, III  
Judge, Division A

  
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Reggie Thomas  
Lafayette City Marshal

Cc: LCG City Council Members  
LCG Parish Council Members