



Virginia Courthouse Facilities Guidelines

(Including Magistrate Offices)

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Office of the Executive Secretary
Supreme Court of Virginia



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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

These Facilities Guidelines provide a basic understanding of the programmatic, design, and operational concerns common to Virginia trial court facilities and magistrate offices. However, each court facility project entails many variables that influence planning and design decisions, including size, location, geography, and site context. The specific solutions may vary by project; therefore, the information provided does not necessarily describe the only acceptable solutions possible. Rather, these Guidelines should be viewed as a helpful tool for individuals in Virginia who are considering or are in the process of undertaking a trial court facilities project.



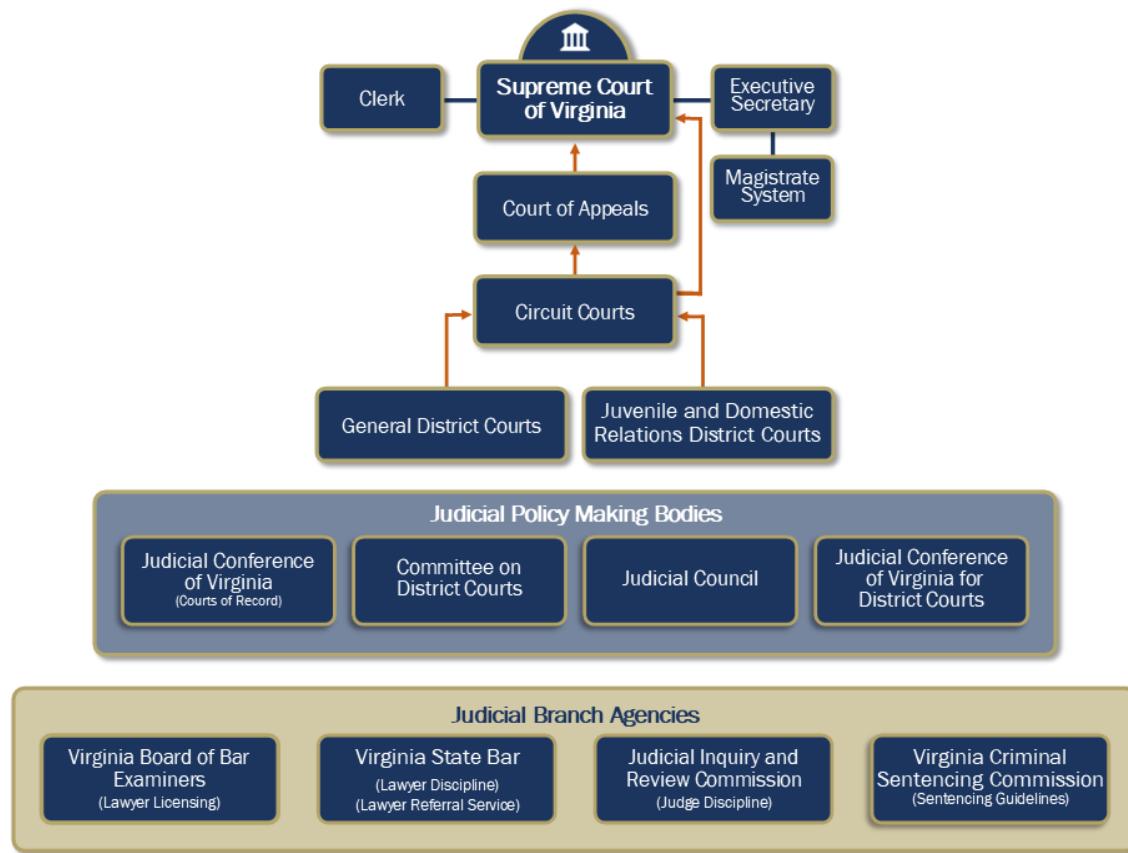
CHAPTER 1 – COURTHOUSE PLANNING BASICS

Chapter 1 begins with a brief description of how courts are organized in Virginia and then proceeds to set forth principles and guidance for planning, designing, and executing courthouse facility projects. The following sections are covered in this Chapter:

- [1.1 Court Organization](#)
- [1.2 Pre-design Planning](#)
- [1.3 Design Phases](#)
- [1.4 Construction Bids and Construction](#)
- [1.5 Project Delivery Methods](#)
- [1.6 Local Governments' Statutory Responsibility](#)
- [1.7 Financing Courthouse Facilities](#)

1.1 COURT ORGANIZATION

Virginia has a four-tiered court system composed of district courts, circuit courts, a court of appeals, and a supreme court. In addition, magistrates serve as judicial officers with authority to issue various types of processes. The courts are organized into 31 judicial circuits and 32 similar judicial districts. The counties and cities served by the circuit and district courts must provide facilities for these courts.



(As of December 31, 2024)



Supreme Court

The Supreme Court was founded in 1779 and exercises both original and appellate jurisdiction. The Chief Justice has responsibility for the overall supervision of the Virginia judicial system. The seven justices of the Supreme Court generally sit in Richmond in the Supreme Court Building. These facilities are provided by the state.

Court of Appeals

In 1983, the General Assembly created an intermediate court of appeals, effective January 1, 1985. It consists of 11 judges who sit in panels of at least three. The Court of Appeals provides for intermediate appellate review of all circuit court decisions in traffic infractions and criminal cases, except where a sentence of death has been imposed; circuit court decisions involving domestic relations matters; and circuit court decisions arising out of administrative agency appeals. It also hears appeals from decisions of the Workers Compensation Commission. The Court of Appeals sits at such locations as the chief judge designates. The panels regularly use circuit court courtrooms within the state.

Circuit Courts

Virginia's general jurisdiction trial court is the circuit court. In civil cases involving \$4,500 to \$25,000, circuit courts have concurrent jurisdiction with the general district courts. They have exclusive jurisdiction in matters exceeding \$25,000. Equity matters, claims seeking a judgment for something other than money (such as adoptions or divorce), are also heard in the circuit courts.

In criminal cases, the circuit court has jurisdiction over the trial of all felonies and of those misdemeanors originally charged in circuit court. The circuit court also has jurisdiction over juveniles aged fourteen and older who are charged with felonies and whose cases have been certified by the judge of a juvenile and domestic relations district court for trial in a circuit court.

Appeals from district courts are heard de novo (completely new) by the circuit courts, as are appeals from certain administrative agencies.

Jury trials may be held in the circuit court. Citizens who might otherwise not have contact with the courts may find themselves called to jury duty in the circuit courts.

The clerk of the circuit court is a constitutional official and is elected to an eight-year term by the voters of the locality. The clerk handles administrative matters for the court, has authority to probate wills, grant administration of estates, appoint guardians, and serves as the custodian of the court records. Citizens may visit the clerk's office for many reasons, including recording deeds and applying for marriage licenses.

District Courts

Each city and county have both a general district and a juvenile and domestic relations district court, although many smaller cities and counties have a combined clerk's office that serves both courts. The general district court hears all criminal cases involving misdemeanors under state law and offenses that are violations of ordinances, laws, and by-laws of the county or city where the court is located.

The general district courts also conduct preliminary hearings for felonies. Jurisdiction in traffic matters extends to all cases in which an adult is charged with a traffic offense. General district courts have exclusive civil jurisdiction in matters involving up to \$4,500, and concurrent civil jurisdiction with the



circuit courts in suits involving amounts between \$4,500 and \$25,000. The district courts do not conduct jury trials.

Juvenile and domestic relations district courts have exclusive original jurisdiction over matters and proceedings involving juveniles and families, except for adoption and divorce, which are handled by the circuit courts. Courtroom attendance for matters heard in these courts is generally restricted to those persons involved in the proceedings. Like the general district court, this court does not conduct jury trials.

Magistrates

The principal function of the magistrate in the Virginia judicial system is to provide an independent, unbiased review of complaints brought by police officers, sheriffs, deputies, and citizens. In each city and county in Virginia, the position of the magistrate represents a key point of interface between the judicial system and the citizenry. Among their many responsibilities Magistrates issue arrest and search warrants, admit to bail or commit to jail, issue subpoenas, administer oaths, accept prepayments for traffic and certain minor misdemeanor offenses, issue emergency custody orders, issue civil, criminal, and medical emergency temporary detention orders, and issue emergency protective orders. Their work involves conducting judicial hearings in response to requests from both law enforcement officials and citizens.

Virginia is divided into eight magisterial regions comprised of between three and five judicial districts. A chief magistrate supervises the magistrates serving within each judicial district.

Additional information about the Virginia Judicial System can be found at: <https://www.vacourts.gov/>

1.2 PRE-DESIGN PLANNING

The first phase of any courthouse project should be pre-design planning. It is during this phase that the project and scope are defined. The need for the project is identified and documented and a decision made as to what type of project is needed. Examples of questions to be answered during pre-design planning include:

- What are the existing issues related to the use of current facilities that should be addressed in the project?
- What is the anticipated growth of the court in terms of workload and staffing?
- What are the space needs for the courts and other entities included in the project?
- Is it a project for a completely new facility, an addition, a remodel of existing space, or a combination of these?

It is important to distinguish between pre-design planning and design. Planning encompasses those steps needed to prepare a proper foundation of the design process. No detailed design is being developed during this phase and the recommended planning elements in this Section 1.2 should precede any design efforts.

Advisory Committee and Other Advisors

It is recommended that an Advisory Committee be formed early in the planning process to provide input into the development of needs and planning options, and to provide guidance throughout the project. The most successful committees include representatives from the major stakeholders in the justice system as well as the local governing body. The committee may or may not be given formal authority to



make decisions; it may, for instance, act only as an advisory panel to the local governing body or funding authority. The committee would typically include some or all of the following individuals and representatives of the following agencies:

- Chief Judge
- A judge and a clerk representing each of the following court levels:
 - Circuit
 - General District
 - Juvenile and Domestic Relations District
- Magistrate Regional Supervisor or Chief Magistrate
- Court Administrator
- Sheriff
- County/city administration, to include for example:
 - County/city government funding units
 - County/city government planning units
- Major court-related agencies, and/or offices housed, or to be housed in the courthouse, to include for example:
 - Commonwealth's Attorney
 - Court Service Units (Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice)
 - Adult Probation (Virginia Department of Corrections)
- Local bar association

Each of the committee members should be familiar with the operations, personnel, and space requirements of the court, department, or office they represent and should be authorized to speak on their behalf. It is also beneficial that the committee members serve for the duration of the project in order to avoid the disruption that may result from the appointment of new members who are not familiar with the reasons for previous decisions.

Engaging Professional Planning, Design and Construction Services

It is important to recognize that courthouse projects can be very complex and typically benefit from the involvement of experienced courthouse planning, design and construction professionals. At some point, either during planning or design, professional assistance is needed to bring a courthouse project from conception to reality. Ensure SCV staff for networking and A/V are brought in from the beginning to alleviate change orders later on. The project size, complexity, and geographic location will all significantly impact the decision to hire experienced professionals. The following criteria may be considered in determining which service providers to select:

- Experience in projects of comparable size, character and complexity
- Capability of individuals to be assigned to the project
- Subcontractor and consultant disciplines and qualifications
- Proposed cost and fee schedule for services
- Proposed project schedule and cost control mechanisms
- Organizational and financial stability
- Work approach and management methodology
- Overall team chemistry and "fit"



Preliminary Budget

Regardless of whether the decision is to renovate, enlarge, or construct a new building, the availability of funds for the project is critical and an understanding of the costs involved is essential for good decision making. The local funding authority or governing body may have the expertise to make preliminary estimates of project and construction costs. In larger projects, the committee or local governing body may want to hire a cost consultant at this point to provide estimates of total project costs. Any architect hired later to prepare schematic and conceptual designs will need a preliminary budget figure from which to work.

Public Support

It is important to keep the public and other interested parties informed during the planning process. There are several things the committee and planners can do, such as making information available on the various options being considered in order to invite public comment. Presentations might be given to the local bar association and civic groups, and information may be given to the local press and other media.

Providing information to the public is essential throughout the planning process and may consist of planning reports, public hearings, presentations by the planners or architects, site and proposed building models, and conceptual design sketches.

It may be advantageous to form a special committee to handle public relations for the project and to make special presentations to interested civic groups and the bar association.

Assessment of Existing Facilities

Many courthouse projects commence with recognition on the part of the users and owners that existing facilities are inadequate. Early in the planning process, deficiencies in the current facilities should be quantified through a facility evaluation and needs assessment. This effort typically involves identification of the courts' operations and systematic evaluation of the facility's infrastructure to support those operations. Topics to be addressed may include space adequacy and adjacency, circulation, security, accessibility, technology and infrastructure, and building condition.

The existing facilities assessment should include a detailed description of the condition of present facilities and a description of the problems with, and inadequacies of, the present facilities including not only courtrooms and offices, but other building amenities and support spaces such as public entries and lobbies, meeting spaces, restrooms, building systems infrastructure, building exterior, etc. The extent to which current problems and inadequacies have affected the organizational structure and operational procedures should be noted so that the findings of the existing facilities assessment can inform what should be addressed in the project.

Court Needs Assessment

An assessment of current and future needs establishes a foundation for the facility planning and design process. It determines the amount of space required and estimates the magnitude of need in the future. By focusing on current needs, and projecting needs into the future, a jurisdiction can commence a renovation or new construction process with a clear understanding of how immediate physical solutions and funding strategies fit into an overall plan for addressing long-term space needs.



A good needs assessment typically involves:

1. Identification of the organizational structure and operational procedures carried on by the courts, court-related offices, and other governmental entities in the building.
2. Projecting the future evolution and growth of the courts and court-related offices based on demographic data, case filings, workload trend analysis and other factors. A good forecasting process, extending fifteen to twenty years, should enable a jurisdiction to improve existing facilities, or to develop new ones, with some confidence in their longevity.
3. Identify possible future judgeship and staffing needs based on the court system's growth analysis described above.
4. Conducting an analysis of service delivery and operational issues impacting space and identifying future enhancements to the function and service delivery of the courts and court-related agencies that should be included in the development of space needs.

Architectural Space Programming

Architectural space programming is the process of identifying the individual spaces to be designed by name, function, size, and relationship to other component spaces. Done properly, programming defines the spaces of a proposed new or renovated courthouse in a manner which will enhance operations and use of the facility. The degree of detail in the architectural program may vary depending on whether the plan is for the renovation of the existing facility, or the construction of a new building.

During programming, intentional and clear decisions should be made regarding preferred methods of operation and development of specific space standards, and interrelationships among all functional areas of the planned courthouse. Specific topics to be addressed may include:

- Design intent and image
- Functional expression
- Adjacency and circulation
- Accessibility
- Security
- Technology

Typically, the program will contain the following elements.

- At a minimum, the space program should include a detailed listing of the types, quantities, and sizes of all spaces/rooms that will be required in the new facilities. To the extent feasible, the square foot area of these spaces should be in accordance with the guidelines hereinafter set forth.
- At a minimum, an estimate of the total square feet required to implement the program should be included (See area definitions below).
- Depending on the specific project needs, a description of security requirements, accessibility requirements, circulation and adjacency requirements, technology requirements, required furnishings and finishes, and environmental needs related to lighting and acoustics, may be provided. Where applicable, information pertinent to future growth needs may be included so that the building design architect who is ultimately charged with design will be aware of all anticipated future growth expansion needs.
- Depending on the specific project needs, the program may include blocking, stacking, and adjacency diagrams which establish the relationships and adjacencies between various program elements. In a blocking and stacking diagram, the basic footprints and stacking of



individual floors may be defined. Typically, high-level departmental functional relationships are illustrated using large blocks of space with relatively little interior detail.

Space Standards

A major determinant of overall courthouse space requirements is the space allocation standards used when designing a courthouse. The development of space standards for individual component parts of the courthouse should reflect forward-thinking court operations while also addressing the specific needs and functional requirements of the respective departments and entities included in the project. Where applicable, local office space standards/practices dictated by the jurisdiction where the court facilities reside should be observed.

Area Definitions

The space program is generally based on the **assignable** space needs anticipated for conducting the planned activities and functions within the court environment, as well as the necessary **unassignable** floor space for items such as wall thickness, circulation, and building support functions. Three types of space data, namely Net Square Feet, Departmental Gross Square Feet, and Building Gross Square Feet are typically used in the development of the space requirements.

NET SQUARE FEET (NSF)

Net area – also called "programmable area" -- is measured in net square feet (NSF). Net area describes the actual working area of a courtroom, office, workstation, or support space. Net area represents the actual area assigned for a specific space for function, excluding interior walls and internal circulation. These facility guidelines include space standards that are described in net square feet (NSF).

DEPARTMENTAL GROSS SQUARE FEET (DGSF)

Departmental area – also called "usable area" – is measured in departmental gross square feet, including all net areas (as described above) and a factor to account for interior wall thicknesses, corridors and pathways within a department, columns and other structural elements, and inefficiencies created by shaft spaces that penetrate through the floors within departmental areas, and the like. This value represents the total area that is typically used when calculating the area on a floor that a specific unit or department would require.

As an example, the DGSF is the amount of area that is required for a department or component such as the Circuit Court Clerk's office or Commonwealth's Attorney's office to function within the building.

The DGSF needed in a courthouse is reasonably consistent with similar requirements in commercial office or government administration buildings except in highly specialized areas, such as courtrooms and prisoner holding facilities that require considerably more internal circulation. Depending upon the type of space and the level of detail provided to building support functions in the NSF portion of the program, the DGSF is calculated by adding 10% - 50% to the programmed net area. The grossing factor will vary considerably depending on function. For example, holding areas where in-custody persons are transported generally have a larger grossing requirement to allow for wider circulation corridors.

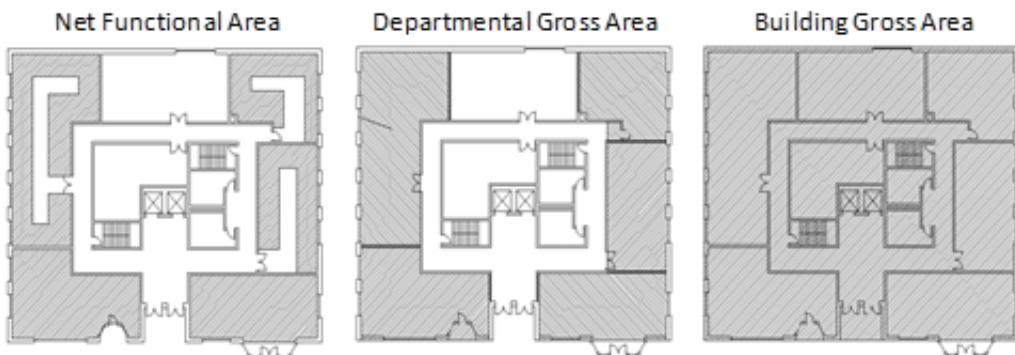


BUILDING GROSS SQUARE FEET (BGSF)

Building gross square feet includes the total of all departmental areas (as described above), with an additional factor to account for major public circulation among departments, elevators, stairwells, mechanical and electrical spaces not specifically included in the project space listing, exterior walls, and any other common spaces not clearly identified as net areas. Building gross area is measured to the exterior surface of permanent outer building walls and includes all enclosed areas. Courthouses require a relatively high grossing factor because of the multiple levels of circulation, assembly spaces, and public waiting areas. Overall building grossing is generally factored in pre-design by adding 25% - 35% to the departmental gross area. The grossing factor will vary by occupancy type and the level of detail included in the various programmed elements.

RATIO OF TOTAL BUILDING AREA TO TOTAL NUMBER OF COURTRoomS

The ratio of BGSF to the number of courtrooms can also be used to estimate the total BGSF. This will produce a rough order of magnitude during the early planning discussions prior to the hiring of a cost consultant. An examination of recent court projects nationally provided a range of 12,000 to 17,000 BGSF per courtroom. A critical factor in determining this ratio is what is to be included in the courthouse. For example, a courthouse that includes Juvenile Court Services and Community Corrections within the building will have a slightly higher BGSF/courtroom ratio than one that does not. For the purposes of early planning, a good ratio for courts in Virginia is between 13,000 and 16,000 BGSF per courtroom.



Master Planning/Determination of Alternative Solutions

The next phase of the project is the development of a facility master plan that identifies various options, discusses the pros and cons, and provides preliminary costs estimates that can be used by the funding authority and users to make decisions on the best course of action. At this stage, it may not be clear whether the best approach is to renovate the existing facility with perhaps the construction of an addition or to build an entirely new facility.

A facility master plan is a comprehensive long term planning document that outlines the design and future physical development of a facility. It serves as a guide for managing and optimizing the use of space, resources and infrastructure over a specified period of time, frequently 20 years. The objective of the master plan is to ensure that the development of site and building elements align with the overall vision, functional needs and aesthetic goals of the project.

A strategic facility master plan is undertaken before architectural designs are commissioned to understand ongoing and future facility needs, and to plan for an orderly and informed response over



a defined planning horizon. The process of developing the plan (and the information supporting it) involves a series of cumulative steps, which arrive at rational, supportable conclusions. The steps involved typically include:

- Assessment of existing facilities
- Future growth assessment
- Confirmation of vision and goals
- Architectural programming
- Development of design scenarios
- Financial planning
- Implementation and/or phasing strategies

If an evaluation and assessment of the condition of the existing facilities was not done as part of a needs assessment one should be done now as part of the master planning process. This information is critical to the decision of whether to renovate all or some portion of the courthouse.

The planning should include a high-level analysis of the range of the costs involved in the implementation of the program under applicable development scenarios (e.g., renovation, new construction) specific to the project. Consideration of construction costs of a new facility must address whether construction should be on the present site or on a newly acquired site and include either the costs of demolition of the present facility and the temporary relocation of operations, or the cost of acquiring a new site.

The planning should include phasing and scheduling considerations with a timetable illustrating key milestones through completion of construction. The timetable should describe any phased implementation of the project, taking into account the disruptions inherent in the construction process, any temporary relocations during construction, and a plan for handling such disruptions. As early as possible in the planning process, the funding agency should be working on the method for financing the project.

1.3 DESIGN PHASES

Architectural design is a dynamic process that involves a tremendous amount of detail and coordination, particularly in its later stages. The design phases are the stages that a project goes through from initial concepts through to the completion of the constructed project. Typically, there are three design phases in a project: 1) conceptual and schematic design, 2) design development, and 3) construction documents. Each phase has specific goals and associated tasks which build on one another. It is important that alternative ideas are explored early on during conceptual and schematic design as it is much more difficult to change course in later stages of design development.

Conceptual and Schematic Design

The **conceptual and schematic design phase** includes verification of program assumptions and establishes the general scope, scale, and relationships among the components of the project. The primary objective is to arrive at a clearly defined, feasible concept while exploring the most promising alternative design solutions.



At the beginning of the phase, several alternative concepts are typically generated. As schematic design proceeds, a single building concept begins to emerge. Once the schematic design is approved by the owner, the project proceeds to the design development phase.

Design Development

In the **design development phase**, the chosen schematic design is refined and developed into a working plan. High level design and operating choices give way to detailed examination of the proposed building in three dimensions. Site plans, floor plans, elevations, and sections are closely coordinated. Detailed engineering systems (e.g. structural, mechanical, plumbing, and electrical) are simultaneously developed, and cost estimates are refined as more information about the project is clarified.

Construction Documents

The **construction document phase** is generally the most labor intensive for the design team and places all of the planning and design decisions into a single set of drawings accompanied by written specifications. The intent is to provide all the information necessary to describe the final building product. This includes complete descriptions and coordination of all building system components, materials, and finishes included in the project. For example, the carpet described in general terms during design development is now described in detail with respect to yarn weight, backing, thickness, color, and density.

1.4 CONSTRUCTION BIDS AND CONSTRUCTION

A bid package must be prepared, typically by an architect, containing all the information contractors will need in order to prepare bids on the project. After advertising the project, a pre-bid conference should be held where contractors and subcontractors can receive information on the project and ask questions. Once bids have been received and opened, the planning consultant/architect will assist the committee and the funding body in reviewing the construction bids for approval. If the bids do not fit within the proposed budget, it may be necessary to review and modify the working drawings to eliminate some aspects of the project so that supplemental construction bids can be obtained that will more closely coincide with the budget. Often, however, by working with the winning contractor to review the bid in detail it is possible to trim construction costs.

The actual construction should be observed and inspected by the architect and the committee, as well as by the public works department, to ensure that the construction complies with the working drawings and the building codes. Supervision must include installation of equipment. If such observation and inspection is systematically carried out and noted errors are corrected, final inspection and approval should be accomplished without difficulty. In larger more complicated projects, local jurisdictions often elect to engage a program or construction manager who is responsible for quality control, schedule, and progress payment requests.

1.5 PROJECT DELIVERY METHODS

Design-Bid-Build

The Design-Bid-Build (DBB) method is a well-established linear process under which most courthouse projects over the last 100 years have been built. There are three primary players involved in this process



including the county (or building owner), the designer, and the builder. The relationships among these three primary players are defined through two separate contracts. Typically, the owner first contracts with an architect for design, and then uses the design documents produced by the architect to prepare a bid package to secure competitive bids from contractors. Finally, based on an accepted bid, the owner contracts with a contractor for construction of the building.

The bid package describes all parts of the project and provides the legal documentation with which the contractor must comply. After bids are received, they are reviewed for compliance with the documents. At this point, project budget negotiation may occur, bid alternatives may be selected, and a construction contract may be awarded.

Some **potential advantages** of the DBB approach include:

- **Transparency and accountability:** The roles and responsibilities of each party are clearly defined, and the owner can monitor the performance of the designer and contractor.
- **Easily understood process:** The DBB approach has a simple contractual relationship, with the architect and contractor each having their own contract with the owner.
- **Potential for lower construction costs:** The DBB approach can result in the lowest construction price.
- **Owner control:** The owner can select the designer based on their qualifications, experience, and reputation. The owner can also review and approve the design documents before they are issued for bidding.
- **Pre-selection of Bidders:** With private entities, bidders can be pre-selected to ensure qualified, familiar professionals.
- **Known construction details prior to bidding:** The awarding jurisdiction knows the final price at bid opening, unless change orders are permitted during the construction process. Also, the architect who prepared the bid package typically remains the owner's representative and can cite the contractor if faulty work is observed.

Some **potential disadvantages** of the DBB approach include:

- **Possibility of longer timelines:** The sequential DBB method can lead to delays because each party waits for the previous one to finish before moving on.
- **Owners at risk from project challenges:** The owner may bear the brunt of project challenges related to delays, cost overruns, and change orders.

Design-Build

In the Design-Build (DB) approach to project delivery, the owner contracts with a single entity for both design and construction. This approach typically involves a Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) Contract¹. As with the Construction Manager at Risk approach (see below), the timing of agreement on a GMP varies with each project. Design-Build approaches have gained popularity in recent years because of an interest on behalf of owners in a single-point of responsibility for both design and construction. Design-Build is also the delivery method associated with Public Private Partnerships (see below) which also include private developer financing and, in some cases, post-construction facility management and operations services in addition to design and construction services.

¹ A GMP contract is a contractual agreement between a contractor and project owner that sets a maximum cost for the construction work of a project.



The DB approach generally requires an explicit determination of the roles and responsibilities of the Design-Build team to establish and document contractual roles.

Some **potential advantages** of the DB approach include:

- **Possibility of fast-tracking:** The use of a single prime contractor under Design-Build allows the possibility of overlapping design and construction phases (fast tracking) which can reduce the overall project delivery time.
- **Budget management:** Budget discussions take place during the design phase, which helps keep projects within a realistic budget.
- **Single point of accountability:** The owner deals with a single entity for the entire project, which simplifies communication and reduces the risk of misunderstandings

Some **potential disadvantages** of the DB approach include:

- **Less owner control:** Critics of the method believe that a single Design-Build contract can limit owner control over design and construction quality.
- **Less contract flexibility:** When a single provider or contractor is responsible for all services, there may be less flexibility in the contract.
- **Potential conflicts of interest:** Since a single entity handles both design and construction, there could be a conflict between cost-cutting decisions and design quality.

Construction Manager At Risk

The Construction Manager at Risk (CMAR) approach, often used for larger and more complex projects, involves a construction manager who typically takes on the risk of building a project. The construction manager and architect operate under separate contracts with the owner. However, unlike a general contractor hired through a Design-Bid-Build process, the construction manager is typically hired prior to the design phase and provides pre-construction services such as advice on time and cost consequences of design and construction decisions.

The CMAR's responsibilities also include construction scheduling, cost control, coordination of construction contract negotiations and awards, purchasing of critical materials and long-lead-time items, and coordination of construction activities. In some cases, the construction manager will make construction decisions before the design is completed in order to shorten the overall project time.

After providing preconstruction services during the design phase, the CMAR takes on the financial risk for construction, usually by providing a guaranteed maximum price (GMP) established at a point negotiated with the owner.

Some **potential advantages** of the CMAR approach include:

- **Reduced financial exposure:** The CMAR assumes some of the risk, which can reduce the owner's financial liability.
- **Transparency:** The CMAR process is often more transparent than other construction procurement methods.
- **Faster project delivery:** The CMAR is often empowered to make decisions on the owner's behalf, which can reduce potential delays.
- **Single point of accountability:** The CMAR centralizes project management, which can simplify the resolution of issues and reduce disputes.



- **Improved project outcomes:** The CMAR's proactive approach to identifying potential issues early can help minimize costly redesigns and delays.
- **Better collaboration:** The CMAR's involvement from the outset of the project can lead to a more trusting and collaborative relationship between the owner and the CMAR.

Some **potential disadvantages** of the CMAR approach include:

- **Single point of failure:** The project's success depends on the CMAR's performance. If the CMAR lacks the right skills, the GMP may be inaccurate, or the CM may not communicate well with owners. Poor estimating, unexpected issues, or mismanagement can lead to losses.
- **Higher costs:** The CMAR approach can be more expensive than traditional project delivery methods because of the CMAR's fees.
- **Late-stage value engineering:** If the project comes in over budget, the project team may cut scope, lower the quality of finishes, or change systems.

1.6 LOCAL GOVERNMENTS' STATUTORY RESPONSIBILITY

Localities in Virginia are required by Va. Code § 15.2-1638 to provide courthouses and suitable facilities for the judges and staff of district and circuit courts, and upon request space for the Commonwealth's Attorney. The costs of doing so are to be paid by the locality and facilities are to be provided in government owned property and not leased. This has traditionally been a responsibility of local government in Virginia.

If the court facilities are deemed to be insufficient or inadequate, the Code of Virginia sets out a process that can be used to compel improvements to a court facility by local Circuit Courts (Va. Code § [15.2-1643](#)).

If a county plans to construct a courthouse at a new location which is not adjacent to the existing courthouse, Va. Code §§ [15.2-1644](#) and [15.2-1646](#) requires citizen approval through a referendum.

1.7 FINANCING COURTHOUSE FACILITIES

Public Financing Options

Court Fees

There are two court fees that may be collected for the purpose of funding courthouse maintenance and construction. Under a statute first adopted in 1990, Va. Code § [17.1-281](#), localities may assess up to a \$2 fee on all civil, criminal, traffic and local ordinance cases for the purposes of construction, renovation, or maintenance of the courthouse or jail and court-related facilities and to defray increases in the cost of heating, cooling, electricity, and ordinary maintenance.

Since 2008, localities may assess an additional \$3 fee per case, specifically for courthouse construction as long as the Department of General Services (DGS) certifies the courthouse as noncompliant with the Virginia Courthouse Facility Guidelines. The circuit court clerk is responsible for collecting courthouse fees and transferring them to the local treasurer. This money is "solely for the construction, reconstruction, renovation of, or adaptive re-use of a structure for a courthouse." Va. Code § [17.1-281](#) (D).

Localities wishing to impose this \$3 filing fee must submit a self-evaluation of their court facility to DGS, indicating how their facility is non-compliant with the Virginia Courthouse Facility Guidelines.



A DGS building inspector then conducts an on-site inspection of the facility to confirm that it is out of compliance. DGS reviews the case and issues a certification of noncompliance, which then authorizes the locality to adopt an ordinance imposing the fee. The locality must reimburse DGS for the site visit and other related costs, which according to DGS have generally been in the range of \$1,100 to \$1,400 in localities that have been certified.

General Obligation Bonds

General obligation bonds are the most commonly used means of financing long-term large public capital improvement projects. They are relatively inexpensive and easy to sell, assuming a good bond rating. The use of general obligation bonds, however, requires voter approval, which is sometimes difficult to receive. The public's appetite for expensive public works projects is limited and courts have to compete with other needs such as schools and roads. If obtained, however, voter approval can insulate public officials from later criticisms. Besides anticipated voter rejection, other disadvantages include 1) tax and debt limitations; 2) need to proceed quickly 3) poor bond ratings, and 4) the desire to avoid restrictive laws in the construction of public buildings.

Revenue Bonds

Revenue bonds financing is available through a variety of public agencies such as a local industrial development authority. The advantage of revenue bonds is that they circumvent the lengthy and unpredictable political process required with general obligation bonds and there may be some latitude in applying laws governing the construction of public buildings. A disadvantage of revenue bonds is that they may be slightly more expensive than general obligation bonds. Another possible disadvantage is the lack of voter involvement which may prove to be unpopular.

Private Financing Options

Private financing is becoming more popular as communities seek ways to leverage their tax revenues to a greater advantage and finance long-needed capital improvements. Public-private partnership is also becoming a more popular option. A public-private-partnership (P3) agreement typically involves a private entity providing the funds and expertise to finance, design and construct (and possibly operate and maintain) the facility. The local government body then buys back the facility through an agreement that may last 30 years.

Certificates Of Participation

One private financing method is the use of certificates of participation which can be used as an alternative to general obligation bonds. The certificate of participation is based on the sale of interests in lease revenue from a capital project; for instance, the revenue from a parking garage that is constructed as part of the project or a bridge for which tolls are levied.

Public-Private-Partnerships (P3)

The P3 financing and delivery method involves a partnership between a public entity, such as a County government and a private entity. In P3 financing, the private entity provides cost, or completion guarantees for which it is given an equity investment in the project. The project requires a dedicated revenue stream with which to pay back the investors. Revenue options might include the use of general funds, special purpose entities, sale and lease-back transactions, enhanced use leasing, property exchanges, development agreements, conduit financing and other methods allowed by law. Inherent in this type of financing arrangement is the need for the local governing body to identify the source of revenue that will support the payments for the term of the agreement.



P3 arrangements can vary in regard to what services are provided by the private entity. For example, in some arrangements, the private entity is responsible for designing, building, and financing the courthouse. In other arrangements, the private entity is responsible for operating and maintaining the courthouse for a set period of time post construction, in addition to designing, building, and financing the courthouse.

Some **potential advantages** of the P3 financing and delivery method include:

- The transfer of risks to private partners related to these areas of responsibility is often touted as a main consideration of the P3 model and this method may ease many of the front-end political problems of general obligation bonds and other methods requiring public approval. Other possible P3 benefits include:
 - May leverage expertise and efficiencies that only a private enterprise can bring to a project that may not otherwise be available to a public construction project.
 - The private enterprise, not the government entity, incurs the long-term debt. Therefore, voter approval is not required, and the governmental entity's debt load is not affected.
 - May reduce the risks associated with cost overruns and cost uncertainty over the life of the contract. For example, P3 typically provides commitments to fixed prices, fixed time schedules, and fixed replacements. Cost overruns are the responsibility of the private entity. There may be less commitment in other delivery methods, and the jurisdiction may bear more responsibility for delays and changes.
 - May allow the project to be completed faster with less likelihood of delays.
 - May defer the need for early public funds because the builder picks up a lot of the early costs.
 - May keep debt off of a jurisdiction's books and allow government entities to fund projects in cases where more traditional government funding models (e.g., revenue bonds) are unavailable.
 - May allow for a lengthier repayment period than that entailed with traditional bonds.
 - The overall cost of the project may be less, based on the assumption that the project will be completed in a shorter time frame and construction costs are expected to increase over time.
 - The loan does not affect the debt load of the governmental entity.
 - The private enterprise carries the risks associated with the project, including cost overruns and delays.
 - Where applicable and included as part of the P3 arrangement, ongoing maintenance of the facility can be a component of the agreement with performance and may allow for a higher standard of building maintenance over the life of the contract. Under P3, the private entity is responsible for maintenance, which is a particular benefit for cash-starved counties that may not be able to otherwise pay for proper building maintenance.

Some **potential disadvantages** of the P3 financing and delivery method include:

- May result in less control by the jurisdiction and court user groups over the design process as compared to traditional delivery methods. This is because cost controls must be set upon agreement and are a critical factor in order to maintain the viability of the project.
- Requires a steep learning curve for public officials not familiar with P3 procurement and contracting.
- May result in added expenses associated with obtaining private financing (i.e., government entities can typically borrow money at far lower rates than the private sector can).
- P3 payments due to private financers may have a significant detrimental impact on the jurisdiction's annual operating budget.



- A P3 project bypasses public approval and may subject the project, the funding body, and the governing entity to resistance from the voters/general public.
- Experience to date with P3 projects demonstrates that these projects receive a limited number of bidders; typically, one to three entities submit bids. This reduced competition could be detrimental; in contrast, competition among a larger number of bidders generally reduces the overall cost and increases the quality of a project.
- The financing for a P3 project typically extends out over a longer period of time than in a traditional building model (may also be a benefit).

Virginia Public-Private Education and Infrastructure Act of 2002 (PPEA)

In Virginia, the Public-Private Education and Infrastructure Act of 2002 (PPEA), authorizing the use of P3 projects, was intended to bring private sector expertise to bear on public capital improvement projects, thus saving time and money. It allows private entities, to “acquire, design, construct, improve, renovate, expand, equip, maintain or operate qualifying projects.” Its purpose is to encourage innovative approaches to financing construction and renovation of public facilities.

Qualifying facilities must be devoted primarily to public use, typically involving public health, safety, and welfare. The Act grants responsible public entities the authority to create public-private partnerships if it is determined that private involvement may be able to deliver the project in a more timely or cost-effective fashion or lead to improvements in the public entities' processes or delivery of services.



CHAPTER 2 – GENERAL GUIDELINES

Developing a new courtroom or courthouse is an opportunity to envision a facility that takes advantage of improved operations and the most recent building trends and technologies. These guidelines provide a basic understanding of the programmatic, design, and operational concerns common to Virginia courthouses and court-related facilities²; however, each project entails many variables that influence planning and design decisions, including size, location, geography, and site context. The specific solutions may vary by project; therefore, the information provided in this chapter does not necessarily describe the only acceptable solutions. Rather, these guidelines should be viewed as a helpful tool for individuals in Virginia who are considering or are in the process of undertaking a trial court facilities project. Design solutions should be appropriate for the court type, size, location, context, project complexity and the community the court serves. For example, a small courthouse in a rural setting requires a different architectural approach than a large urban courthouse.

- 2.1 Building Image
- 2.2 Functional Expression
- 2.3 Adjacency and Circulation
- 2.4 Accessibility
- 2.5 Wayfinding and Signage
- 2.6 Security
- 2.7 Technology
- 2.8 Expansion, Adaptability and Flexibility
- 2.9 Sustainable (Environmental) Building Design
- 2.10 Lighting
- 2.11 Acoustics
- 2.12 Ergonomic Design

2.1 BUILDING IMAGE

Overall Considerations

Building Image relates to the use of architecture to express the societal values and concepts of the administration of justice. In Virginia, courthouses come in many shapes and sizes depending on the makeup of the city or county in which they reside, when the courthouse was constructed or most recently renovated, and the unique operational environment of the agencies and user groups specific to the courthouse. Despite this diversity, courthouses are universally held as a symbol for the dignity and observance of the Commonwealth's judicial tradition. Courthouse architecture now, as in the past, is a physical embodiment of order, dignity, and respect for the law.

The formal arrangement of participants and courthouse elements reflects society's view of the appropriate relationships between judicial authority and all present parties. Historically, the courthouse has achieved identity through its size, site placement, and distinctive architectural elements, such as columns, domes, and grand entrances. Modern courthouse designs may use more contemporary and

² A magistrate's office located outside a courthouse is an example of a court-related facility.



non-traditional architectural approaches to reflect an appropriate image. Specific design responses will vary, depending on the court facility size, type, site context, and values of the local community.

In general, the design should present an image that:

- Engenders public trust and confidence by projecting an image of transparency, openness, balance, fairness, and dignity.
- Reinforces the importance, independence, and stability of the judicial system through a design that is distinctive and emblematic of the courts.
- Is easily understandable and accessible to all visitors and court user groups.
- Reflects the community's traditions and culture.

2.2 FUNCTIONAL EXPRESSION

Overall Considerations

Functional expression in courthouse architecture refers to creating an appropriate environment for courtrooms, support areas, and related offices. The spaces should promote efficient operation with consideration given to workflow, adjacencies, and the placement of functions within appropriate circulation zones. The provisions should be made in the building infrastructure to allow for effective, meaningful, and efficient interaction between the courts, justice partners, and user groups involved with the court. This will promote more efficient processing of cases.

Courthouses built today differ significantly in function from those built several decades ago. In fact, it is arguable that the function of courts today dictates a considerably more complex and nuanced environment than seen in any other civic building type. No other building type accommodates such a complex mix of individuals with unique needs simultaneously as a courthouse does. For example, courthouses must be able to accommodate unique and sometimes conflicting space needs for the general public, jurors, judges, attorneys, victims and witnesses, in-custody defendants, juvenile populations, court staff, and a multitude of other government service providers. Courtroom layouts from decades ago such as the "Jeffersonian placement of attorneys' tables facing each other" are generally bad from a technology standpoint. The same can be said of Jury placement in front of the judge's bench.

The planning for new court facilities often spurs a discussion of how the courthouse operating environment should be shaped and arranged for the future. It is understandably challenging to envision operational models and facilities that differ from one's experience; however, court leaders guiding a new court facilities project will most likely have few similar opportunities available at any other point in their careers to shape the future environment. Examples of functional areas that warrant consideration during space planning consideration include caseload management, workflow and business process analysis, technology implementation and integration, space utilization analysis, and public service environment enhancements.

2.3 ADJACENCY AND CIRCULATION

Overall Considerations

The concept of adjacency and circulation refers to the functional relationship between spaces within the building and the way people move among those various areas. Courthouses are organized both horizon-



tally across each floor and vertically across multiple stories. Careful consideration should be given to the placement of various functions within a courthouse in order to promote a better service environment, enhance security, and reduce stress on building infrastructure. This is true when planning a relatively modest single courtroom expansion or a large new courthouse.

Generally speaking, higher volume public spaces and services should be positioned on the first floor near the public entrance or lobby, while functions requiring less public contact or quieter surroundings, such as judges' chambers, are better suited for placement on a higher floor or at some distance away from the main lobby. Functions requiring higher security levels, such as in-custody holding, should always be planned with emphasis on separating them from public and staff areas.

Circulation Zones

The need for specialized circulation patterns is a primary characteristic that distinguishes courthouses from more generic building types, such as office buildings. Courthouses require three separate and distinct zones of circulation: public, restricted, and secured. The organization of these circulation zones may vary depending on the nature and location of departments and uses within the building. A brief description of the three types of circulation zones follows.

Public Circulation Zone

The public circulation zone provides unrestricted public access from the main building entrance to the various public and functional components of the building. This includes the main lobby, corridors, public elevators and escalators, public washrooms, waiting areas, court clerk counters and reception areas. It also includes access to the many court and ancillary offices, such as the Commonwealth's Attorney and other offices such as Juvenile Court Services or Community Corrections if located in the courthouse.

The public circulation zone also includes the public waiting areas located immediately adjacent to courtrooms and attorney conference rooms.

Users of the public circulation zone include courthouse staff, prosecutors, lawyers, police officers, witnesses, reporters, accused persons not in custody, members of the public attending family or civil cases, individuals conducting business at the clerks' offices, and courtroom spectators. Public access should be clearly defined and provide a direct route from the main building entrance to all public destinations within the building. Public access into the building should be through the main entrance of the building and through a weapons-screening station operated by security screening staff.

Restricted Circulation Zone

The restricted circulation zone provides dedicated access for judges and court staff to courtrooms, chambers, and offices. The corridors and vertical circulation systems that make up the restricted circulation zone connect courtrooms, chambers, support space, and restricted parking areas. The restricted circulation zone should not intersect with the public or secure circulation zones. For security reasons, restricted circulation must provide judicial access from secure judicial parking facilities to private elevators and offices.

All access points to the restricted circulation zone must be controlled. This zone is largely contained within the space envelope of the judge and staff areas of the building. Maintaining the integrity of this zone relies on controlled access points between the public and restricted circulation areas. The restricted circulation zone can include connecting elevators and stairs between restricted areas on



multiple floors. Depending on the location, the building's fire egress stair system can be used for this function.

Secondary Restricted Circulation

There is generally a secondary restricted circulation zone in larger courthouses for building support functions. This zone includes spaces that serve as building service areas for the courthouse, such as the receiving dock, program and building storage areas, building maintenance areas, and mechanical spaces accessed through the secondary circulation zone. Entrances to the building through the receiving dock must be secure, with controlled access. Access from public circulation into these areas should be controlled and managed through secure doors.

Secured Circulation Zone

The secured circulation zone provides dedicated access for in-custody defendants between the in-custody entry point or sally port, central holding and intake areas, secure attorney interview rooms, courtroom holding areas, and the courtrooms. The design of these areas is intended to prohibit unauthorized public access and mitigate the risk of escape by detainees. Careful consideration should be given to the proximity of in-custody areas to the courtrooms, as long distances can significantly affect transport operations. This circulation zone also often provides access to building security areas (e.g., command center) controlled by the sheriff.

In-custody areas, including the vehicle sally port, holding cells, command center, security personnel offices, and ancillary spaces, must be treated as a secure entity alongside the secure in-custody circulation zone and courtroom holding cells. In-custody defendants will enter the courthouse through a secure vehicular sally port, proceed through a receiving area to a secure admitting and staging area, and are then typically placed in a holding cell within the central holding area before being escorted to the courtroom for their hearing or trial. When the courthouse is adjacent to a jail or detention facility, detainees may be brought to the courthouse through a secure walkway. In such cases, the central holding area can be reduced or even eliminated, with in-custody individuals escorted directly to the holding areas adjacent to the courtrooms.

Temporary holding cells located immediately adjacent to courtrooms reduce transport time by allowing individuals to be staged close to the courtrooms and provide a means to quickly isolate unruly detainees by removing them from the courtroom.

A secure in-custody elevator serving holding cells located between pairs of courtrooms is the most efficient way to provide direct access to courtrooms without crossing restricted judicial/staff corridors. This feature is especially essential in large multi-storied buildings.

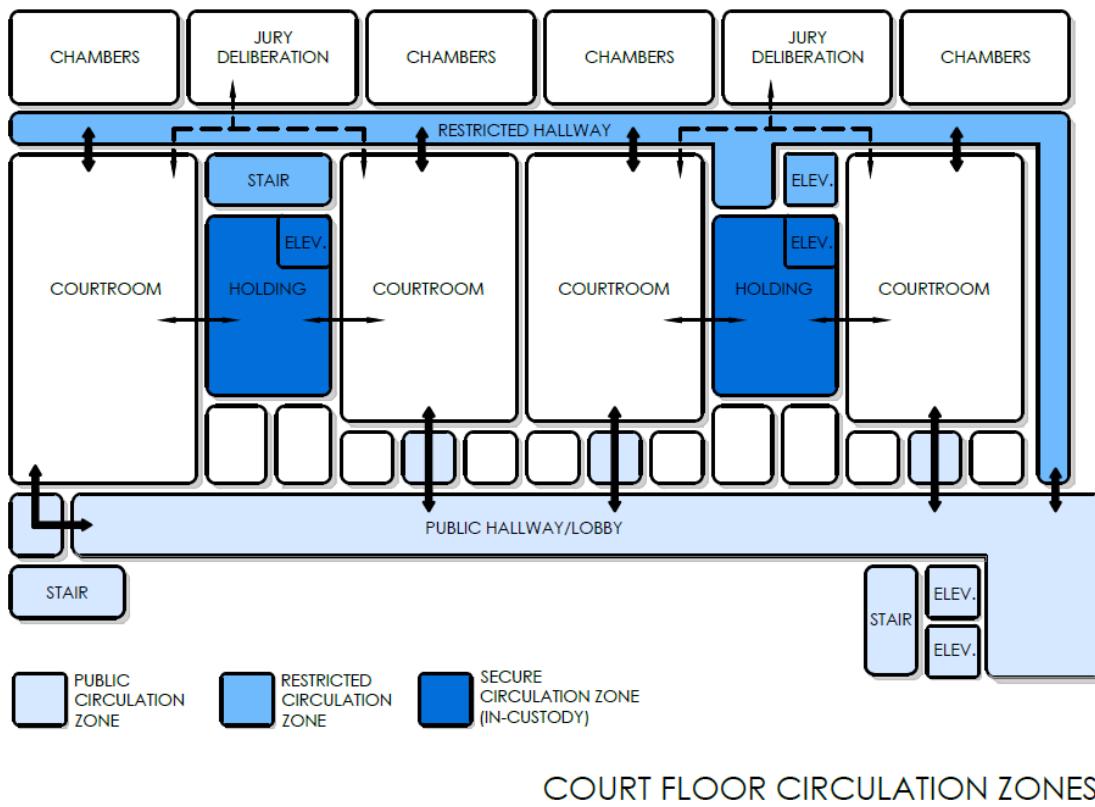
For more detailed information regarding specific components within secure areas, refer to [Chapter 3, Section 3.3.](#)

Courtrooms- Confluence of Zones

A courtroom is the focal point of all court facilities and is the primary destination for judges, court staff, attorneys, witnesses, and public spectators conducting business in a formal setting. Access to the courtrooms should be carefully planned, with separate entrance approaches provided for each participant group.



The following courtroom and ancillary space diagram illustrate the various access points for different user groups.



Horizontal and Vertical Circulation

Horizontal travel distances for public, private, and in-custody circulation should be minimized through efficient floor layouts that facilitate easy navigation, unobstructed sightlines, and allow adequate space for people to pass side by side.

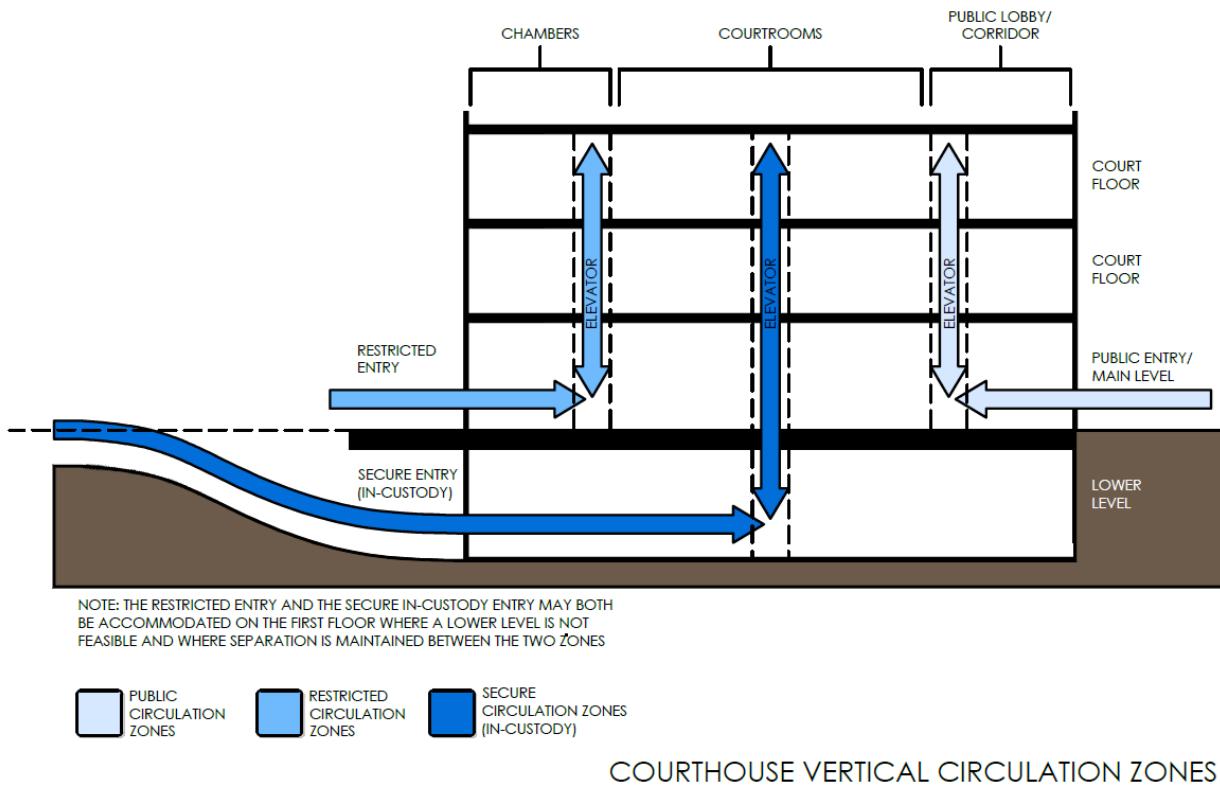
High-traffic / high-volume court functions such as clerk offices and General District courtrooms will affect vertical transportation requirements. Efficient and rapid public access to these areas is essential. Peak loads must be accommodated.

Depending on the building size, one or two elevators may be required for private circulation for use by the judges, court staff and escorted jurors. These private elevators must serve all floors with courtrooms, the clerks' offices, judicial chambers, and secure judicial parking.

In large buildings, a separate dedicated service elevator is desirable for moving materials and furniture throughout the building. This elevator should be located near the receiving area and provide access to all floors.

In large courthouses with high foot traffic, consideration should be given to installing escalators between lower floors that house high volume functions, such as clerk's offices and traffic courtrooms.

The following diagram indicates the circulation zones through a multi-story building.



2.4 ACCESSIBILITY

Overall Considerations

Access to justice is a fundamental right that can only be ensured if courthouses are accessible to all people. In the pursuit of accessibility for all, regardless of disabilities or limitations, the "Seven Principles of Universal Design"³ should be considered as much possible when planning court spaces. These principles outline the design of environments, including buildings and services, that are accessible to everyone, regardless of age or disability. For example, accommodating the needs of self-represented litigants and individuals subject to guardianship enhances the functionality and accessibility of courts for all users. Below are descriptions and selected guidelines related to the seven principles of design:

1. Equitable use.
 - a. Provide the same means of use for all users and avoid segregating to stigmatizing any users.
 - b. All users should be provided with the same privacy and security measures.
 - c. Design should be appealing to all users.
2. Flexibility in use.
 - a. Design should accommodate a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

³ These principles were developed in 1997 by a group of architects and designers at North Carolina State University.



- b. Provide choices of use.
- c. Accommodate both right and left-hand individuals.
- 3. Simple and intuitive use.
 - a. Make use easy to understand, regardless of user's experience or acuity.
 - b. Eliminate complexity.
 - c. Accommodate range of literacy and language skills.
- 4. Perceptible information.
 - a. Communicate necessary information effectively to the user.
 - b. Use different modes of communication (pictorial, verbal, tactile)
 - c. Maximize legibility of essential information.
- 5. Tolerance for error.
 - a. Minimize hazards and adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.
 - b. Provide fail safe features.
 - c. Provide warnings of hazards and errors.
- 6. Low physical effort.
 - a. Provide for efficiency and comfort with a minimum of fatigue.
 - b. Minimize repetitive actions.
 - c. Minimize sustained physical effort.
- 7. Size and space for approach and use.
 - a. Provide appropriate size and space for use regardless of user's size, posture, or mobility.
 - b. Provide clear line of sight and reach to use elements for any seated or standing user.
 - c. Accommodate variations in hand and grip size.
 - d. Provide adequate space of use of assistive devices or personal assistance.

In addition to general design principles for all courthouse users, specific legal requirements must be met to accommodate persons with disabilities. These individuals must be provided convenient, accessible entry into the courthouse and barrier-free access to all appropriate interior spaces. Courthouses, however, pose a unique challenge for persons with disabilities due to traditional design elements intended to project strength and dignity. Architectural features such as large columns, heavy doors, and grand staircases traditionally used to convey a reverence for the law, may impede accessibility. Additionally, functional requirements that involve floor elevation changes throughout the courthouse can create significant obstacles for individuals with disabilities.

Special attention should be given to accessibility when planning new courthouse construction or renovation projects for older courthouses, recognizing that barriers to facility usage may be different for various individuals. The planning and design of court facilities should include consideration for people with hearing or vision impairments, as well as those with invisible disabilities. Moreover, non-disabled user groups, such as pro-se litigants unfamiliar with courthouse environments and individuals with Limited English Proficiency, may also require special accommodation to ensure accessibility.

All renovations and new construction must be barrier-free and designed to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Title II requirements for governmental facilities. The ADA mandates that people with disabilities must have equal access to government buildings and services. These requirements are outlined in the [2010 ADA Standards](#) and the [2004 ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities](#) (ADAAG), as adopted by the US Department of Justice (DOJ). According to ADAAG, all public, restricted, and secure areas must be ADA accessible when newly constructed or renovated. Additionally, all renovations and new construction must comply with Commonwealth accessibility requirements.



Areas of concern with respect to ADA compliance include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Building entrance access (which entrances are often raised above the surrounding grade).
- Restroom access.
- Access into courtrooms and within courtrooms (which can be challenging because of required floor elevation changes).
- Access to clerk and other public service areas.

Permanently installed assistive listening systems should be provided in courtrooms, hearing rooms, jury deliberation rooms, and jury assembly or orientation rooms. Because it is not always feasible to change courtrooms or jury deliberation rooms when someone requires an assistive listening device, consideration should be given to installing such equipment in all relevant rooms. At a minimum, 50 percent, but not less than one, of each type of courtroom must have a permanently installed assistive listening system. Additionally, 50 percent, but not less than one, of each of the following types of spaces must have a permanently installed assistive listening system: hearing rooms, jury deliberation rooms, and jury assembly or orientation rooms.

Refer to [Appendix A, Section A-1](#) for ADA background information and for further details regarding accessibility in various courthouse areas such as courtrooms, jury rooms, and holding facilities.

2.5 WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE

Wayfinding

Wayfinding systems are designed to inform people of their surroundings in unfamiliar environments and help them navigate with ease. Effective wayfinding techniques benefit all court users. Everyone who visits a courthouse will appreciate a well-designed wayfinding system, which can also enhance accessibility for individuals with low literacy and those who may feel stressed, intimidated, or anxious when seeking court services.

When entering an unfamiliar environment, people consciously and unconsciously look for visual cues to understand their location and orient themselves toward their desired destination. Wayfinding systems incorporate architecture, lighting, landscape, and other visual elements such as elevators, stairs, information desks. Effective wayfinding strategies can complement or even reduce the need for signage. For instance, in a courthouse with a simple and straightforward floor plan and circulation system, visitors are more likely to intuitively find their way to services. Ideally, signage builds upon wayfinding and navigation systems to further facilitate the use of a space.

Courts in Virginia are increasingly implementing Video Docketing Systems (VDS) to streamline navigation for visitors and improve overall efficiency. A primary component of VDS includes digital docket boards which should be conspicuously located in prominent public areas of the courthouse and should display helpful information such as party names, courtroom, hearing time, attorney names and customized messages from each court. A Location Administrator from the Department of Information Technology (DJIT) will coordinate the installation, which may be in the courthouse lobby, court waiting room or attorney waiting room. Additional discussion of VDS and digital docket boards can be found in the Technology section below.



General wayfinding considerations for new and remodeled courthouses include:

- Use the building's landscaping and architecture to signify the entrance and entry sequence.
- Provide space within the lobby for persons to orient themselves before passing through the screening area.
- Create simple, straightforward floor layouts to assist users orient themselves inside the building.
- Locate high-volume functions near the main public entrance.
- Simplify public traffic flow in terms of direction and complexity (e.g., reduce directional choice points, alternate corridors, and an excess of doors).
- Ensure direct sight lines to important functions in public corridors so court users can easily navigate the space and maintain their orientation.
- Include visual access to the outdoors in all public spaces to serve as an orientation guide.
- Incorporate well-marked architectural features or landmarks near decision points within the courthouse (e.g., windows, doors, skylights, public art, color, texture, and scale).
- Ensure that all interior spaces are well lit, incorporating natural light where possible and using effective artificial lighting strategies throughout.
- Make intentional interior design decisions that indicate destination points within the courthouse to enhance orientation (e.g., stylized door types, door surrounds, and interior glazing).
- Choose finishes that balance uniformity and differentiation without creating overly uniform or overly complex interiors. Ideally, these elements should complement each other seamlessly.

Signage

Clear, legible, and strategically placed graphics and signage are essential design elements in a court facility. Signage directs visitors and staff to their destinations and contributes to a positive courthouse experience by orienting users and minimizing confusion.

Signage should integrate with a building's wayfinding and navigation system to help users locate their destinations. Signage begins at the exterior of a building, providing necessary information and direction to visitors regarding entry and exit points, security requirements, building function and activities, services, and hours of operation. Paths and services accessible to persons with disabilities must be clearly marked, along with parking options for cars and bicycles. Interior signage is particularly important for identifying offices and services, providing directional assistance, and orienting visitors within the building. Regulatory signage, such as evacuation methods, smoking restrictions, is also essential.

General signage considerations for new and remodeled courthouses include the following:

- Signs should utilize pictographs and images whenever possible, as these can be understood by individuals without visual impairment, regardless of language proficiency.
- Signs should specify items that are forbidden within the court building, promote a non-smoking policy, and indicate the locations of male, female, and all-gender restrooms.
- Prominent directional and informational signs should be used throughout the courthouse. These signs should complement the interior decor, be uniform and professional in appearance, and be placed in the lobby and on each floor.
- Other essential signs include office names; room numbers; officials' names and titles; counter signs such as criminal or civil; restricted access warnings; directional signs with arrows; special handicap facilities; quiet zones; and brief procedural guidelines (e.g., "order and pay for photocopies here").
- Additional signage should be provided for individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP).



- Signage indicating the availability of free language access services should be clearly displayed at the courthouse entrance. Ideally, this message should appear in English and in the languages commonly spoken within the local community.
- In particular, this verbiage should utilize plain language, written at an appropriate reading level, rather than specific court terminology. For example, instead of identifying a "Docket," a sign may be more useful for someone with LEP if it were to send the message, "Verify case information here."
- Courts should especially consider multilingual signs to identify important locations, such as at the main entry, clerk offices, and court waiting areas. For example, signage near courtrooms indicating post-court obligations (e.g., fine payment).
- All signs should be regularly reviewed for accuracy, as offices and functions may change locations within a courthouse. Additionally, signs should contain the English equivalent alongside any translation into a foreign language. Under no circumstances should signs be updated in English without also updating their translated equivalents.
- Provide braille signage (also referred to as tactile ADA signage) for people with visual impairments. When creating Braille signage, ensure it adheres to ADA guidelines including braille type (i.e., Grade 2, which means it uses the same characters as standard braille, but also includes characters for common words and letter combinations), shape, size, spacing, positioning ,

Additional suggestions for implementing a successful signage program include:

- Provide a coordinated approach to signage throughout the interior and exterior of the building, to provide members of the public with appropriate information to inform their visit to the courthouse.
- Assure consistency of signage across floors, departments, or functions.
- Avoid hand-lettered signs except as a temporary measure.
- Place signs at key destination points. Use signage judiciously to balance reliance on architectural features that facilitate wayfinding with complementary signage that enhances clarity without overcrowding the space.
- Position building directories in the same location on each floor.
- Place signs either perpendicular (preferable for visibility) or parallel to destination entrances.
- Utilize international symbols for appropriate functions or elements whenever possible.
- Ensure signs are located in consistent places across multiple floors.
- Space signs so that each successive sign is clearly visible from the previous one.
- Maintain uniformity in signs regarding color, font style, and scale.
- Use sans-serif or other legible, bold font types.
- Choose high-contrast color schemes for better visibility.
- Provide detailed information on signs at major decision points.
- Where feasible, incorporate scannable codes, such as QR codes, into the signage program to provide supplemental building and service information via mobile technology.

Given that the occupancy and use of court facilities will typically change over time, it is essential that signage systems be developed with flexibility in mind. These changes can influence the use of the courthouse, including jurisdiction and types of cases being heard, the type and strategy of court service deployment, and the use of court ancillary support areas.

Examples of possible flexibility strategies include:

- Installing signs that allow court staff to change sign information by incorporating glass - or plastic-covered spaces for inserting paper signage;



- Providing extra space on office or department signs for affixing court notices and other information;
- Increasing use of electronic signage to complement static signage; and
- Ensuring continuity with signage supplier to accommodate internal changes, making it easier to maintain consistency in new signs.

2.6 SECURITY

Overall Considerations

Our nation has few traditions as cherished as the commitment to free and open access to justice. The expectation of courthouse security and safety is integral to fulfilling our justice system's promise of accessibility, transparency, and the right to a fair and impartial trial. Ensuring free and open access to justice requires a safe and secure environment where all who work in and visit the courthouse are free from fear and intimidation.

When planning a new courthouse or undertaking a major renovation of an existing one, a primary objective should be to promote a high degree of security and safety within and around the building. In addition to case-related safety concerns, security planning should anticipate potential threats such as terrorist events, cyberattacks, and natural disasters (e.g., hurricanes, tornadoes, and other severe weather) that can cause disruptions in judicial proceedings. The site, landscaping, building exterior, internal organization and circulations systems, as well as environmental and building systems, should be planned to maximize the security and safety of judges, court staff and all visitors, physical structures, equipment, property, and the information within the courthouse.

The courthouse should provide an environment where court proceedings can take place safely and with dignity, minimizing danger to the judiciary, staff, and public. Judges, court employees, victims, witnesses, the accused and their families, attorneys, and the public should be able to carry out their duties and business without the fear of intimidation, harassment, or physical harm. Security measures should be visible yet unobtrusive.

A key element in courthouse security is the designation of separate designated spaces for the public, judges and staff, and in-custody individuals. In small rural courthouses, the configuration of existing facilities may require that separation be achieved through operational means. In larger courthouses, separation is best accomplished architecturally through separate and distinct circulation zones, as described in [Section 2.3](#) above.

The planning and design of court facilities should incorporate applicable security recommendations for all courthouse components. Refer to [Chapter 3](#) for recommended security measures for various courthouse interior areas; for exterior spaces, see below.

Security Technology and Infrastructure

The planning and design of courthouses should include provisions for an integrated security technology platform that operates independently of other video/audio technologies. This security technology infrastructure should feature a comprehensive system of cameras, duress alarms, access control systems, and the capability for courthouse lockdown.



Provision should be made for visual and audible alarms, as well as public address and audible alerting systems. The system should be capable of issuing automated alerts and notifications, as well as manual announcements from either local officials or the central command center. The security technology should be integrated so that all of these systems (e.g., cameras, duress alarms, door access controls, lockdown devices) trigger alarm notifications at the courthouse security command center. Examples of integrated security technology include:

- When a duress alarm is activated, it produces both an audible and a visual notification on the camera monitors in the command center, enabling staff to observe what is happening at the location of the activated duress alarm.
- Similarly, when an intrusion alarm is activated, it generates both an audible and a visual notification on the camera monitors in the command center, allowing staff to monitor the situation at the location of the intrusion.
- When cameras are alerted to an activated duress or intrusion alarm, they will immediately begin recording to ensure an accurate account of the security event is captured.

See [Chapter 3, Section 3.4](#) for more detailed information regarding the command center and electronic security systems.

Building Exterior and Perimeter

Security planning should incorporate structural elements, architectural barriers, and access controls throughout the building's perimeter and interior. Vehicle barriers, such as heavy planters or bollards, should be installed at sensitive ground-floor areas (e.g., building entrance).

The following actions are recommended to secure the site and perimeter:

- Illuminate the building exterior, site perimeter, walkways, driveways, and parking areas. Refer to [Appendix A, Section A-2](#) for detailed illumination criteria for areas outside the courthouse.
- Design the site using accepted Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles. Ensure an appropriate building setback distance from the street (a minimum of 50 feet from the curb is suggested where feasible).
 - Clearly define the courthouse grounds with fences, walls, or other physical barriers. Retaining walls can help delineate property boundaries within the landscape design.
 - Provide appropriate barriers to prevent a vehicle from approaching the building and adequate protection from potential blast effects. The barrier should protect the building but should allow for individuals with physical disabilities to be dropped off close to the entrance of the building.
 - Use natural barriers (e.g., trees) and constructed barriers (e.g., planting boxes, heavy masonry benches and tables, access ramps with masonry walls, fences, and bollards).
 - Eliminate landscape features that could provide hiding places for weapons or other dangerous items. Select landscaping materials carefully to reduce potential hiding spots. Regularly trim trees, shrubs, and other landscaping to prevent obstruction of security camera images and also to eliminate potential hiding places for assailants or weapons.
- Maintain clear access routes for first responders.
- Provide a secure parking area for judges. See [Chapter 3, Section 3.4](#) for detailed recommendations regarding judges' parking.
- Install alarms on all accessible openings at the courthouse openings, including ground-level windows and doors.
- Apply security film and tinting to windows and doors at the courthouse entrance and other areas with potential heightened threats. Examples include ground-level windows and those offering a line



of sight into the courthouse (e.g. courtrooms or judges' chambers). Use ballistic-rated glazing where possible.

- Ensure security camera coverage around the courthouse perimeter, including the building exterior, all entrances/exits, walkways, driveways, and parking lots. Ensure video camera sightlines are not blocked by leaf canopies or hidden from overhead observation.
- Use weather and tamper-resistant fixtures for all exposed equipment.
- Enclose and secure all exposed gas, electric, and other utilities to prevent public access, tampering, and weather exposure.
- Lock and cover roof/penthouse openings with an intrusion alarm system. Also, secure all other courthouse openings (e.g., tunnels, service ports, culverts, utility/sewer manholes) with locks and intrusion alarms.
- Secure air ducts and other openings. Protect air intake ducts from potential introduction of harmful substances.

2.7 TECHNOLOGY

Overall Considerations

Courts have witnessed dramatic changes in the technology and equipment needed to support their work. Reliance on technology has increased and will continue to transform how courts conduct business. Advances in video technology, for example, have made it possible to conduct court proceedings remotely. Virtual or remote proceedings, where appropriate for the case or hearing type, offer the following potential benefits:

- Reduction in the need to travel
- Increased safety
- Less time consumption
- Easier scheduling
- Greater cost-effectiveness
- More efficient use of time for judges, attorneys, and court participants
- Reduced pressure on courtroom facilities and resources
- Improved convenience and consideration for victims and witnesses

Continued improvements in office-related technologies can also be expected to enhance individual worker productivity, improve communications, reduce movement within and between offices, decrease the physical use of paper and storage needs, and lead to various other changes in court operations. Additionally, evolving technologies offer opportunities to enhance public access to justice by providing new and better ways for the public to access court services.

Taking advantage of current and evolving technologies presents significant opportunities and challenges to those involved in the process of building or remodeling a courthouse. Keep in mind that racks that contain technology or rooms that are used for technology should be well ventilated & cooled* Not sure this is the right spot but should be covered somewhere.

Video Docketing Systems (VDS)

As mentioned in the discussion regarding wayfinding, Courts in Virginia are increasingly implementing Video Docketing Systems (VDS) to streamline navigation for visitors and improve overall efficiency. A



primary component of VDS includes digital docket boards which should be conspicuously located in prominent public areas of the courthouse and should display helpful information such as party names, courtroom, hearing time, attorney names and customized messages from each court. A Location Administrator from the Department of Information Technology (DJIT) will coordinate the installation, which may be in the courthouse lobby, court waiting room or attorney waiting room.

Advantages of implementing VDS and digital docket boards include:

Improved Wayfinding: Digital docket boards prominently display updated court schedules, case numbers, and locations for proceedings, making it easier for visitors to locate courtrooms and other services. This reduces confusion and limits the need to ask for directions.

Enhanced Efficiency and Reduced Wait Times: By clearly showing schedules, docket boards help visitors know where they need to be and when, minimizing waiting times and bottlenecks in common areas. Digital boards also enable courts to update information instantly in case of schedule changes, avoiding delays and confusion.

Reduced Demand on Staff: With clear information readily available, visitors are less likely to approach staff for directions or updates, allowing staff to focus on other responsibilities. This can be particularly beneficial in high-traffic courthouses where resources may be limited.

Accessible Information for Self-Represented Litigants: For individuals unfamiliar with court procedures or who may not have legal representation, docket boards provide a user-friendly, visual interface that makes it easy to find relevant information without needing prior knowledge of the court's layout.

Enhanced Security and Crowd Management: Digital boards can also serve as communication tools in case of emergencies or security incidents. They can display urgent announcements, helping staff manage foot traffic and ensuring visitor safety.

Integration with Other Digital Tools: Many courts are linking docket boards with online systems, so visitors can check schedules on their mobile devices before even arriving at the courthouse. Some boards are interactive, allowing users to look up specific cases or access directories for court services.

Paperless and Eco-Friendly Approach: Docket boards support a more sustainable operation by reducing the need for printed schedules and signs. This aligns with broader green initiatives many courthouses and government facilities are adopting.

Docket boards are part of a wider movement in courts to create a more tech-friendly, user-centered experience, blending practical wayfinding with real-time information and responsive design for visitors.

Remote and Hybrid Courtroom Proceedings

The convening of court proceedings either completely remotely (i.e., all participants appearing virtually) or in a hybrid fashion (i.e., a proceeding that includes both in person and virtual participants) has become a reality in Virginia courts and in courts nationwide. The potential for these types of proceedings to continue and expand in the future is significant. The use of virtual meeting platforms for remote and hybrid proceedings, supported by new technologies, may provide more options for court users and the public to access court services. The use of technology to enhance access to the courts through remote and hybrid settings will likely be sustained.



New court facilities should adopt a forward-thinking vision that embraces the opportunities offered by remote and hybrid court functions. With continued and likely growing reliance on these proceedings, courtrooms and hearing rooms should be planned to accommodate a wide range of technology. This includes high-quality video and audio streaming and recording capabilities, which will require a robust wiring and network infrastructure. Provisions for video and audio technologies should be planned and pre-wired in all courtrooms and hearing rooms. These systems should be integrated with courtroom A/V systems, court electronic recording systems, virtual proceeding platforms, and digital evidence presentation systems.

The increased use of technology will impact how courtrooms are used. Large public gatherings and lengthy wait times for litigants can be mitigated and replaced with more flexible, staggered court dockets. Future courtrooms will increasingly be designed to accommodate both in-person and remote participants.

Planning for virtual and hybrid proceeding capabilities in courtroom environments should be prioritized. Where some participants appear in person and others remotely, it is essential to ensure that all participants can engage equally to the fullest extent feasible. For example, individual screens should be provided in the physical space so that remote participants appear at a scale and prominence comparable to those attending in-person. In essence, integrating technology to support remote and hybrid proceedings should be regarded as equally important as designing the physical space for in-person use. Key areas of focus for this integration include:

- Courtroom layout (refer to [Chapter 3, Section 3.2](#) for sample courtroom layouts)
- Screen size and placement
- Camera placement
- Microphone placement
- Audio reinforcement
- Recording Systems
- Physical and digital evidence display
- Lighting and room acoustics

Consultation Support and education

The Executive Secretary's Department of Judicial Information Technology has established a Video Conferencing Applications Team to provide guidance, support, and training for video conferencing solutions in the judiciary. This team will advise on A/V technology for renovations and new courthouse builds, emphasizing the importance of early involvement to ensure critical infrastructure is not overlooked.

The Team also offers training on video conferencing tools and ongoing support for these products, currently recommending Poly video endpoints and Webex accounts. They collaborate with court staff and external integrators to address the court's needs effectively, ensuring that personnel receive appropriate technical expertise and avoid unnecessary purchases that duplicate existing resources. It is advisable to designate an in-house technical liaison to oversee the specific needs of each local court complex.

The Team can provide recommendations regarding courtroom layouts to ensure that the design is amenable to technology integration. For example, cameras and monitors should be placed together opposite to the Witness location. Also, when a jury is involved, confidence monitor(s) should be put in place for them. Designs utilizing Jeffersonian courtroom layouts that have attorney tables facing each



other and or Jury boxes that sit in front of the Judges' bench are not optimal for Video Conferencing. Sample courtroom layouts can be found in [Chapter 3, Section 3.2](#).

Courtroom Proceedings - Evidence Presentation Systems

With the use of advanced evidence presentation systems, everyone in the courtroom can have a "front-row seat" during court proceedings. One challenge in implementing these systems is making them unobtrusive. To ensure an effective system, equipment should be positioned to support trial activities without disrupting the normal functions of the court and the individual work areas in the courtroom. Video screens should be placed in prominent locations that are viewable to all persons in the courtroom. Care should be taken to maintain adequate viewing angles and sightlines for all in-person participants as well as those appearing via video.

Provisions for evidence presentation systems should be planned and pre-wired in all courtrooms and hearing rooms. This includes cabling, built-in equipment, and flat panel video display monitors positioned at multiple locations to avoid obstructing views. Additionally, careful consideration should be given to the placement of cameras, display monitors, and other equipment to ensure usability without interfering with movement and sightlines. Digital evidence display capabilities should be integrated into the courtroom's audio/video system and virtual proceeding platforms. All evidence should be routed through the Judge, allowing them to decide what should be seen and by whom.

Courtroom Proceedings - Sound Reinforcement Systems

Particularly in larger courtrooms, audio amplification systems should be installed to allow the judge, jurors, litigants, and public spectators to hear and understand the participants clearly. Proper acoustic design should be ensured, including the selection of sound-reflective and sound-absorbent surfaces, whenever audio enhancement systems are installed. (See [Section 2.11](#) for more detailed information on acoustics.) A high-quality sound system is also essential in courtrooms where audio and video recording systems are used. Engaging a specialized acoustical/audiovisual consultant may be necessary to assist in the layout and design of the speakers and to determine the appropriate level of amplification. A poorly designed sound system can result in worse acoustics than a courtroom with no sound system at all.

Sound reinforcement systems consist of microphones, electronic mixers, signal processors, amplifiers and speakers. The sound system should be designed to operate automatically, with automatic mixers controlling microphones by turning them on when being spoken into.

Microphones should be placed at the judge's bench, clerk's workstation, witness stand, lectern, jury box (if present), and attorney tables. Controls should be located at both the judge's bench and the clerk's station. Automatic volume controllers should be used to help compensate for variations in voice levels and distance from microphone. The master controls should be positioned at the judge's bench and clerk's workstation, and should include a power switch, master volume control, mute functions, and override controls. Sound systems should also provide for independent Microphone muting as well as sound masking with White noise for side bar communications.

Floor Cabling Systems

The rapid pace of technological advancements necessitates the frequent upgrading and addition of new equipment. To avoid obsolescence, it is essential to maintain flexibility in a building's capacity and ability to adapt to these changes.



For new construction, strategic planning should include the installation of raceways in the courtroom floor to allow for placement of electrical and data cabling. In some cases, access flooring may be used to create a plenum beneath the flooring to run cabling. Additionally, there are cost-effective products available that do not significantly alter floor level. These products, such as low-profile floor cabling systems, are particularly useful for remodeling projects. They can be mounted on top of the sub-floor and sit flush with finish flooring material, such as carpet.

The use of low-profile floor cabling systems should be considered as a potential solution for remodeling various courthouse areas, including courtrooms, conference rooms and open offices. These systems are described as floor-mounted wireway solutions that provide power and data cabling without the need for trenching, core drilling, or power poles. They are designed to be flexible and highly configurable.

Public Access to Court Services

The use of remote electronic access to the courts has been growing steadily, enhancing efficiency and improving public access and service. Evolving case management systems and online portals will continue to expand remote electronic access to case information and services from offsite locations. The public will increasingly be able to access court services remotely, utilizing self-service technology and online services. Examples of benefits from such remote access include:

- The ability to file and distribute documents electronically.
- The ability to search for court calendars and case information electronically.
- The ability to pay fines and electronically sign documents.
- The ability to download court forms and upload completed forms electronically.

Courthouses should be designed to facilitate public access to court information and services electronically, both through in-person public access terminals and remotely through web portals. Examples include kiosks at public lobbies or clerk areas for accessing online electronic information or services, as well as check-in kiosks at entrances to high-volume courtrooms or jury assembly areas.

A significant impact of electronic filing and other technologies is a potential reduction in the need for individuals to visit the courthouse. Except for those without access to computers or other suitable electronic device, those lacking appropriate accommodations at home, individuals ordered to appear in person, or those who prefer conducting business in person, many people may no longer need to visit the courthouse to conduct routine business. This reduction in foot traffic may affect areas such as parking requirements and public transaction counters.

Despite potential impacts on the volume of in-person traffic, there will remain a need for a full range of services to support in-person interactions at the courthouse. Courthouses should be planned to seamlessly support both physical and electronic remote services. The following are examples of how technology can be utilized to expand public access to court services:

- Virtual service centers:
 - Members of the public could remotely access a virtual room to speak online with a dedicated staff member who has the expertise relevant to their needs.
- Kiosks inside the courthouse (either pre- or post-screening), allowing the public to:
 - Determine the date and location of a proceeding.
 - File case-related documents.
 - Make a payment of a fee or fine.



- Check in for or schedule an appointment with court or clerk staff or staff of a court-related agency.
- Self-service counters, with chairs and computer terminals:
 - These areas can provide the same or even more services than a kiosk, offering a more comfortable setting.
- Video conference booths/rooms (e.g., "Video Pods," "Zoom Rooms," "Remote Access Booths,"), allowing the public and/or attorneys to:
 - Attend remote hearings, including those held in the same courthouse or elsewhere in the state.
 - Meet remotely with service providers, attorneys, or others not located at the courthouse.
 - Design considerations for such spaces:
 - Include provisions for ensuring privacy and acoustic separation from adjoining spaces.
 - Accommodate either an individual or a small group, depending on anticipated activities and use.
 - Be constructed as modular, stand-alone booths or enclosed meeting rooms equipped with appropriate A/V infrastructure and technology.



Case and Records Processing – Automation, Imaging, and Workflow

The evolution of case and records management systems is expected to bring increasingly seamless integration of electronic records with automated workflows and functions. In many courts, attorneys can already file pleadings, and recorders can submit documents directly from their offices. Signed documents are often distributed electronically, eliminating the need for physical routing to judges or other participants. Additionally, fines, fees, and other payments can be processed through electronic transactions, and trial court records can be transferred digitally for appeals. As these technologies advance, clerks are likely to engage in less in-person public interaction, as noted previously.

The future will also see a much-reduced need for, or even the elimination of, large record rooms and record storage vaults as more information is automated, imaged, stored, and made available electronically. At the same time, the space needed for imaging equipment and workstations, public access terminals, remote meeting pods, and other public access workstations, may increase. Nonetheless, considerable savings in space can occur in clerk's records areas as the result of replacing physical documents such as land record books, lien books, order books, judgment books, and even case files with imaged documents stored electronically.

One of the most significant physical limitations on court facility planning has traditionally been the need to maintain a close spatial relationship between the physical case file and those who need to use it (judges, clerks, or the public/attorneys). Automated case and records management systems now allow courtrooms and chambers to be located separately from the clerk's office while still providing remote



access to all case records. In modern courthouses, physical proximity between the clerk's office and the courts they support are less critical. Another consideration is the placement of the circuit court clerk's records room, which may house decades of records stored in heavy, bound books and storage cabinets that require substantial structural support due to their weight.

Continued advancements in office and related technologies are expected to enhance individual worker productivity, improve communications, reduce movement between and within offices, decrease the physical use of paper, and minimize storage needs. These improvements will bring various changes to court operations and public and individual workspaces. Although less quantifiable, the severing of physical ties will enable managers to consider cross-training, adopt new operational methods, and give workers more freedom of movement. This shift highlights the need for flexibility in office areas to accommodate potential changes in court operations and staffing requirements.

Case Processing - Workstation Technology

It should be assumed that every workstation or office in the courthouse will require equipment and technology to support a modern courthouse environment. This includes, at a minimum, a computer workstation or docking station and video display monitors that facilitate remote interactions and video conferencing. Many workstations will require dual monitors. Additional devices that may need to be accommodated include phone chargers, battery chargers, and computer tablets. Depending on the office and function, a printer and document scanner may be required. The specific equipment requirements for workstations can be anticipated to change over time as technology evolves. Workstations should be designed, to the greatest extent possible, to accommodate these evolving equipment needs.

Additional computer workstations will include the public counters in the clerks' offices and the Circuit Clerk's records room. Counter workstations should be equipped with a document scanner and printer. In general, it should be assumed that each workstation will require at least two data lines and one voice line (3 CAT 6 lines), along with a minimum of two quadruplex electrical outlets. Specialized workstations may require additional electrical outlets.

Future Implementation of Technology

The most critical consideration when planning for the future implementation of technology is ensuring sufficient flexibility to allow for the easy upgrade of current systems. This means that courthouses should be designed to facilitate system expansion, as well as frequent changes and upgrades to existing infrastructure.

For instance, the network data backbone infrastructure, consisting of a Main Distribution Frame (MDF) room and Intermediate Distribution Frame (IDF) rooms, should be vertically aligned to create a dedicated vertical network backbone that is easily accessible for future expansion or replacement. Additionally, data conduits, raceways, and power cabling/wiring should be designed to maximize future flexibility throughout the courthouse, enabling the addition or replacement of wiring and cabling as new technologies are implemented. Planning for future camera locations will save the cost of having to pull cables at a later date.



2.8 EXPANSION, ADAPTABILITY AND FLEXIBILITY

All courthouses should be built to accommodate future changes and growth in the courts. This requires buildings that can be easily expanded, spaces that can serve multiple purposes, and areas that can adapt over time to new uses and needs.

Physical Expansion

Changes to courthouses become necessary at some time in the building's lifespan, so new courthouse planning should include expansion options that take into account both anticipated future growth of the courts and the potential for unforeseen changes. This planning should consider how the building might be expanded to include additional courtroom sets and other court or court-related functions. It is also important to address how the horizontal and vertical components of the three circulation zones⁴ could be extended to support expanded operations. Expansion strategies are typically influenced by the building's location and site parameters and may include both horizontal and vertical solutions.

Adaptability and Flexibility

Adaptability refers to the capacity of space to be converted for use by other functions. The level of adaptability can be increased through a design based on modules and structured around well-defined primary circulation routes. One method of expansion involved moving a component to a new building or addition and using the vacated space for the expansion of courtrooms or other core court functions. For such a strategy to be effective in creating additional courtroom sets, the space in question requires a structural system design with appropriate column spacing and floor-to-floor heights to accommodate future courtroom sets.

Flexibility refers to the capacity of individual spaces to be used for various throughout the building's lifetime. Maximizing flexibility can be achieved by limiting the range of enclosed office spaces and having most of the work processing space in open office areas. This allows furniture, fixtures and equipment to be easily reconfigured to meet evolving needs without the need for reconfiguring walls.

Strategies for Accommodating Future Growth

Over time, the facility needs of any court are bound to change and evolve. A robust forecasting process and a thorough analysis of potential operating policies can help officials plan for long-term solutions. However, variable growth in caseload or case types is certain to occur during a fifteen- or twenty-year period. Not all policy or procedural changes can be anticipated, no matter how thorough and insightful the analysis. Several measures can extend the operational life of a facility. Architectural strategies to allow for future expansion or changes in workload include:

- **Site selection:** When selecting a site, consider whether there are opportunities for horizontal expansion.
- **Standardized design:** Use standardized floor-to-floor heights and structural bay sizes throughout the building to enable the conversion of any non-courtroom space into courtrooms.
- **Strategic placement:** Locate functions within the building to maximize future space utilization flexibility. For example, general governmental and court-related offices may be strategically located within a new or renovated courthouse with the potential for future relocation. As more space is

⁴ See Section 2.3 above.



needed, non-court functions can be moved to nearby buildings, allowing core court functions to expand. This strategy can significantly extend the functional life of the facility.

- **Unfinished space:** Within budgetary constraints, consider constructing extra space that is initially left unfinished (shelled space) to be used later. This can be done to accommodate future courtrooms, with space being used for storage or for other offices until needed.
- **Expansion strategies:** Consider future on-site building addition strategies. Vertical expansion should be coordinated with structural and mechanical systems to ensure that additional floors can be supported in the future. Horizontal expansion should be planned in conjunction with the overall site plan to utilize adjacent land effectively.
- **Circulation and Access:** When developing future space allocation strategies, be mindful of the circulation and access requirements for potential future uses, in addition to those in the initial use.
- **Courtroom standardization:** Consider standardizing courtroom design. The degree of variation in courtroom sizes and capabilities should be carefully evaluated. While a jurisdiction may be able to reasonably predict the total number of judges over a fifteen- to twenty-year period, it is often harder to accurately forecast the growth of individual calendars, such as criminal, civil, probate, family, and juvenile. Courtrooms designed to accommodate a wide range of litigation types provide flexibility and ensure long-term usefulness, regardless of unexpected growth, changes in jurisdiction or pandemic-related effects. Courtroom standardization is a common strategy utilized in smaller jurisdictions.
- **Satellite and Mobile Offices:** In some large counties or urban areas of Virginia, clerks' offices have set up satellite or mobile offices to provide services to parties without the need to visit the courthouse. Examples of these services include providing certified copies of court orders or land records, issuance of marriage licenses, and free notary services. Leased office space or unused, local government offices can accommodate this need.

Remodeling Considerations

In many cases, funding may be limited, reducing opportunities for new court facility construction. This is especially true in small and rural cities and counties. In such situations, efforts to improve court facilities are more likely to focus on renovating or remodeling of existing space or adaptively using buildings not originally intended for court occupancy. When considering the use of existing facilities, assessing the suitability of space for accommodating court functions is a critical point of interest.

Remodeling existing space for court occupancy can be a challenging and complex undertaking. Courthouses are highly specialized compared to other building types, and their design must address a range of specialized planning considerations. Construction projects involving the conversion of buildings not originally intended as courthouses must be carefully assessed to ensure suitability for court use. Key considerations in evaluating the feasibility of remodeling or adaptive reuse include:

- **Building Size:** Is there sufficient floor space available to meet the current and future operational needs of the court? Does the building's footprint allow for appropriate functional adjacency between various court and court-related functions?
- **Building Configuration:** Does the building's floor plan and layout align with the design requirements of modern courthouse construction, including distinct zoning of space and access control, as well as separate circulation zones for various users? Modern courthouses are designed with specific access control and circulation requirements that organize the building into several distinct zones with similar functions, operational needs, physical characteristics, and access



requirements. These zones include areas for judges and judicial support staff, jurors, public visitors and in custody prisoners⁵.

- **Structural Spans:** Does the existing structural grid provide sufficient spacing between columns to create a column-free courtroom space?
- **Floor Heights:** Is the existing floor-to-ceiling height sufficient to meet the requirements for courtroom ceiling height? Courtroom ceilings should be proportional to the room's size for symbolic and environmental reasons and should provide an appropriate distance above a judge standing at an elevated bench.
- **Building Infrastructure:** Are essential elements such as the building exterior, windows, roof, HVAC systems, life safety systems and elevators in good repair and capable of functional operation in a repurposed court building?

2.9 SUSTAINABLE (ENVIRONMENTAL) BUILDING DESIGN

Sustainable building design aims to minimize negative environmental impacts while meeting the needs of its occupants. Courthouses should be designed to incorporate sustainable design principles, including informed choices about the building site, reduction of construction waste, selection of building materials, water and energy efficiency, heating and cooling systems, indoor environmental quality, and the use of renewable energy. Appropriate energy systems are critical for court facilities that are being planned to last fifty years or more.

To address energy and environmental concerns, many localities aim to have their courthouses LEED⁶ certified. LEED, considered the world's most widely used green building rating system, is a proprietary certification process. In some cases, planners may specify that a courthouse be designed and constructed to meet a certain LEED level, such as silver, without pursuing formal LEED certification process.

While participation in the LEED certification process is optional, compliance with applicable local building codes is mandatory. It is essential to reference local building codes for the most recent requirements governing minimum standards of energy efficiency and sustainability. Additionally, other sustainable design standards and programs exist beyond LEED. When considering sustainability, architects and engineers should prioritize proven design approaches and building elements that enhance court facilities for occupants and lead to cost-effective, sustainable buildings. Future courthouses should ideally incorporate sustainable concepts to reduce environmental impacts while maximizing operational and energy efficiency.

Sustainable building strategies as published by the US Green Building Council⁷ include the following:

- **Location and transportation:** Involves selecting project locations that have a reduced environmental impact and provide access to alternative transportation. Strategies include selecting a site with access to public transportation, providing bicycles and changing facilities, and implementing programs that reduce the parking footprint.
- **Sustainable sites:** Focus on making environmentally conscious decisions regarding a building's surroundings. Strategies include reducing heat island impacts, reduced use of water resources, alternative transportation planning, and responsible landscape and site development strategies.

⁵ See Section 2.3 above.

⁶ LEED stands for "Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design"

⁷ See www.usgbc.org



- **Water efficiency:** Involves efficient indoor and outdoor water use through strategies such as reducing water demand, using water-saving fixtures and equipment, reducing outdoor water use, harvesting rainwater and graywater, and installing water metering systems.
- **Energy and atmosphere:** Emphasizing strategies that aim to reduce a building's operational carbon emissions by optimizing energy performance, implementing energy conservation practices, and integrating renewable energy sources (e.g., solar power).
- **Materials and resources:** Focuses on selecting construction materials and managing construction waste to minimize environmental impacts. Encourages the use of materials that are more environmentally friendly, have a lower environmental impact throughout their life cycle, and are sourced regionally or locally as much as possible.
- **Indoor environmental quality:** Refers to strategies that improve indoor air quality, temperature, and ventilation. Indoor environmental quality has a direct impact on the experience of those working in and visiting the court. Natural daylighting should be utilized as much as possible to lower the amount of artificial lighting needed and to provide a more pleasant work environment. Sun shading and glare-reducing elements should be introduced where possible.
- **Project Innovation:** The Innovation in Design category in the LEED rating system encourages projects to use innovative strategies and technologies to improve building performance. The category's purpose is to encourage the use of new technologies and processes to broaden the scope of green buildings. It also recognizes the efforts of project teams that provide environmental benefits beyond the other LEED credit categories.

2.10 LIGHTING

Natural Lighting

Natural lighting, or daylighting, is highly desirable for public areas and workspaces in courthouses. Potential benefits for building occupants include:

- Improved worker productivity
- Reduced eye strain: Natural light can help minimize eye strain, headaches, and drowsiness compared to artificial lighting environments.
- Improved mood
- Enhanced focus
- Increased workplace satisfaction
- Better sleep quality and overall health: Natural light can have lasting positive effects on the physical and mental health of office workers.

Space within 35 feet of a window is most suitable for both open and closed-office configurations. Depending on the design, space within 20 feet of windows provides the best natural illumination and the potential for external views. Areas beyond 35 feet from windows, known as "deep spaces," are typically less suitable for office occupancy but are well-suited for equipment and storage rooms due to easier environmental control and access to services and elevators.

Other methods for introducing natural lighting, including in courtrooms, involve the use of skylights, light wells, and interior windows that capture reflected light from exterior windows. When incorporating natural light in courtrooms, care should be taken to avoid issues such as glare, shadowing, heating and cooling complications, security sight line problems, and visual distractions.



The design of office areas must strike a balance between the importance of natural light and external views for building occupants and the need for light control for video display screens. Display monitors should be positioned so that their sight lines are substantially parallel to windows to manage contrast and to provide more visual comfort. For video conferencing, staff should avoid sitting with their backs to a bright window to prevent visual discomfort.

Natural and artificial lighting should be balanced, with adjustable artificial lighting levels to accommodate various natural lighting conditions.

Interior Lighting

Direct lighting, indirect lighting, and lighting from ceiling, wall or floor-mounted fixtures should be integrated to achieve optimal illumination levels. As noted above, natural lighting should be incorporated into the interior lighting design wherever possible. For detailed information regarding illumination level criteria for various functional areas inside the courthouse, refer to [Appendix A, Section A-2](#).

Whenever feasible, light fixtures and associated fittings should be of standard commercial design to avoid obsolescence and maintenance issues. Custom-designed fixtures should be avoided. The number of fixture types used in the courthouse should be minimized, and bulb types should be common and easily replaceable.

In renovation or historic preservation projects, certain spaces that contribute to the character of a historic structure may be identified. These spaces should be illuminated in a way that enhances their historic and architectural significance. Maintenance and rehabilitation of historic lighting fixtures may be necessary. Care should be given to avoid placing fixtures, switches, conduit, or other electrical facilities through character-defining architectural elements.

A lighting layout that provides an even level of general illumination throughout the building's general areas (e.g., public spaces, office areas, courtroom/chamber areas) is typically desirable. In open office areas with systems furniture, lighting calculations should consider the light obstruction and absorption caused by workstation partitions. Task lighting may be employed when systems furniture obstructs the even distribution of light, resulting in insufficient lighting levels for specific functions.

Special lighting design concepts should be developed for lobbies and public corridors. In general, the lighting design should be an integral part of the architecture. Wall fixtures or a combination of wall and ceiling fixtures may be used in corridors and tunnels to break the monotony of a long, plain spaces.

Courtroom Lighting

When planning courtroom lighting, the following should be taken into account:

- **Proper Level of Lighting:** Lighting that is either too bright or too dim can create physiological and emotional reactions among participants, impacting the proceedings and the court's efficiency. Participants must be able to see each other and the evidence clearly without straining. Greater intensification of lighting should be provided in the litigation area, as proper lighting also contributes to the security of the courtroom.
- **Interior Finishing:** The type, color, and texture of finishes used for the floor, walls, ceiling, and both fixed and movable furniture can affect the effectiveness of the lighting system. Interior finishes should be evaluated based on their ability to reflect light as well as their aesthetic qualities.



- **Aesthetics:** The lighting system should respect the dignity of the courtroom and should not be an eye-catching design feature. The system should focus on testimony and evidence without drawing attention to itself.
- **Performance Characteristics:** The system must provide the appropriate level of lighting for each specific task, ensure comfort, and maintain an efficient layout.
- **Energy Consumption:** Light fixtures should be energy-efficient, with low wattage and minimal heat output to avoid negatively impacting the air conditioning and comfort of the space. The operation of the lighting system should also be cost-efficient.
- **Maintenance:** Fixtures should be easy to service and require minimal maintenance.
- **Control Flexibility:** Certain courtroom functions require dimming controls (e.g., display of certain digital and physical evidence). The placement of these controls is critical, and consideration should be given to who operates them and how disturbances would be managed if the lights are dimmed. A single control station for all courtroom lighting should be considered, as well as the use of pre-set or programmed lighting settings that can be activated by the push of a button. Manual slide dimmers should be avoided if multiple banks of dimmers would be complicated to adjust manually during proceedings. Lighting controls should never be accessible to the public.
- **Contrast:** A certain level of contrast is necessary for physical and psychological comfort so that everyone in the courtroom can see clearly. Normal contrast (e.g., black letters on white paper) is easily perceived, while low contrast (e.g., black letters on a dark gray background) can strain the eyes. When planning the lighting system, three zones of contrast are important.
 - **The task itself:** such as a piece of paper on a desk or an exhibit on display.
 - **Surrounding surfaces:** such as the desk or wall. The surrounding zone should ideally be slightly darker when the primary task is immediately adjacent to it.
 - **Distant surfaces:** such as the floor, walls, and ceiling.Excessive contrast between two surfaces can cause glare. Direct glare comes from sources such as direct sunlight, bright windows, and exposed light sources. Reflected glare occurs when light sources reflect off of highly specular finishes, such as polished marble. Reflective glare is more common in courtrooms and can be mitigated by reducing the specular quality of surfaces or repositioning light sources to move them out of the glare zone.
- **Security:** The coordination of lighting levels with the sensitivity of security cameras should be addressed early in the project.

Workstation Lighting

Lighting design should enhance both the overall architecture of the courthouse and the effect of individual spaces within it. In general, lighting should provide adequate illumination for tasks, be sensitive to the needs of the occupants, be economical to operate and maintain, and present an appropriate appearance for its intended use. In designed spaces, the lighting system should typically not be a focal design feature but should emphasize function, enhancing the illumination of tasks, people, and architectural elements.

Necessary lighting levels vary depending on the activities being performed, but lighting in court facilities should enable clear vision, color recognition and fast cognition without causing eyestrain. The lighting system design should balance the requirements for light intensity and the need for lighting contrast.

Offices and other areas that use computer video display systems should incorporate indirect or diffuser-shielded ceiling fixtures. Diffusers or lenses should be made from non-combustible acrylic. Generally, areas designed for intensive computer use should have the same lighting conditions as standard office spaces.



In spaces where electronic video displays are used, light intensity and contrast between room surfaces should be carefully considered and reduced as necessary. This is particularly important in courtrooms, where clear observation and recognition of facial features, expressions, and court exhibits are essential.

The following additional guidelines apply to electronic video displays:

- **High resolution and brightness:** Electronic video displays should be high resolution and provide high brightness and contrast.
- **Positioning:** Displays should be positioned at a 90-degree angle to strong light sources, such as windows or bright lights, to minimize glare.
- **Glare management:**
 - Adjust the screen angle as needed to reduce glare.
 - Screen filters may be required if other methods of glare reduction are insufficient.

Lighting Controls

The use of automatic or programmable lighting controls is encouraged. The application of these controls and the design of controlled zones depends on several factors, including frequency of use, available daylight, standard and extended work hours, and whether the space uses an open or closed office plan. All of these factors must be considered when establishing zones, zone controls, and appropriate lighting control systems.

Enclosed space lighting controls may include switches, multi-level switching, occupancy sensors, light level sensors, or micro-processors. Lights can be zoned by individual spaces or across multiple spaces. If microprocessor controls are used to turn off lights, a local means of override should be provided to ensure continued operations when needed.

The following are commonly used lighting controls:

- **Photoelectric sensors:** Detect light levels and automatically adjust lighting in response to natural light conditions in spaces that receive daylight.
- **Occupancy sensors:** Used for small, enclosed spaces without windows (e.g., offices and restrooms). Each occupancy sensor should control no more than 12 fixtures. Occupancy sensors should not be used in open office areas or spaces with heat-producing equipment or in corridors.
- **Microprocessor control, programmable controller or central computer control:** Suitable for managing multiple enclosed spaces or large zones.

The placement of lighting controls in courtrooms is critical. A primary control station for all lighting, audio, video, and security operations should be provided, incorporating pre-set or pre-programmed lighting settings, with a secondary overriding control at the judge's bench. Consideration should be given to who operates the controls and how to handle disturbances if the lights are dimmed.

Open space lighting controls may include switches, multi-level switching, light level sensors for areas near windows, and microprocessor controls for specific zones within the space. Remote control schemes and lighting reductions managed by a programmable controller, microprocessor, or central computer should be considered. If microprocessor controls are used to turn off lights, a local override should be available to ensure continued operations when necessary.

For security reasons, lighting controls should never be accessible to the public. Where controls are located in public spaces, they should be protected by secure coverings.



Exterior Lighting

Exterior lights should comply with the values indicated by the IES Lighting Handbook. For detailed information regarding illumination level criteria for exterior lighting around the courthouse, refer to [Appendix A, Section A-2](#). Some general recommendations include:

- **Illumination levels** should provide consistent lighting to meet security requirements.
- **Exterior lighting** should enhance the building's architecture while also ensuring the safety and security of the building perimeter.
- **Lighting fixtures** should be installed at all entrances and exits of major structures, including loading docks.
- **Exterior lighting circuits** should be controlled by photocells, and a time clock controller to accommodate both all-night and part-night lighting conditions.

2.11 ACOUSTICS

When designing a courthouse, careful consideration should be given to the acoustic performance of the various types of functional spaces in the building. Acoustic performance includes both acoustic isolation and acoustic control. Acoustic isolation refers to reducing sound transmission between adjoining spaces, while acoustic control involves managing the quality of acoustics within a space.

The acoustic concerns for each type of functional space differ, so the design should account for the unique acoustical requirements of each. For example, in in-custody holding areas, noise generated within the space should not disrupt courtroom proceedings. In the courtroom, it is essential that everyone can clearly hear the witnesses and other participants, and that noise from outside does not interfere with the proceedings. In spaces such as conference rooms, jury deliberation rooms, private offices, and chambers, confidential is key; conversations should not be audible outside these spaces.

Acoustic Isolation

Spaces in a courthouse should be designed to provide different levels of acoustic isolation. Effective noise isolation helps ensure that privacy is maintained and minimizes distractions from adjoining areas.

Privacy refers to the ability to limit speech intelligibility to the intended listener. The level of privacy depends on the loudness of speech or sounds within a space, the sound transmission characteristics of the partition between spaces, and the background noise in both the originating and receiving spaces. The acoustical properties of a partition can be specified by its Sound Transmission Coefficient (STC)⁸. The Noise Isolation Classification (NIC) describes the level of privacy achieved by considering these combined factors; but it can only be measured after a space is constructed and occupied. Decisions about sound isolation should be made based on the required level of privacy. The levels of privacy include:

- **Inaudible privacy:** No sound whatsoever travels between spaces.
- **Confidential privacy:** Sound can be detected, but it is impossible to understand what is being said.
- **Normal privacy:** Noises can be heard but are not easily understood; deliberate eavesdropping is required to comprehend conversations in adjacent areas.

⁸ STC values measure how well a material or assembly reduces sound transmission. Higher STC values indicate better sound blocking capabilities.



- **Minimal privacy:** Only partial control of distracting noise is achieved.

The following factors affecting privacy should be taken into consideration during the design phase:

- **Sound level inside the room:** This is a major factor as it determines the noise reduction that the intervening wall must provide to ensure conversations are not heard outside the space.
- **Placement of less critical structures:** Storage areas, less-critical offices, or other semi-public spaces can be strategically placed between the sound source and the receiving room to help mitigate sound transmission.
- **Traffic circulation:** The type of construction needed to ensure privacy can be influenced by the traffic circulation adjacent to a space. Court buildings near airports or other sources of high-noise sources should include special exterior glazing and gasketing systems, designed with input from a qualified acoustical consultant.
- **Trade-offs in acoustical decisions:** Many acoustical decisions require balancing cost, speech privacy, and speech intelligibility. These compromises must be carefully considered to achieve the desired level of acoustic performance.

For technical guidance for optimal STC values for adjacencies between various courthouse functional areas, refer to [Appendix A, Section A-3](#).

Acoustic Control

Spaces in a courthouse should be designed to provide various levels of acoustic control. Decisions regarding acoustic control, including Background Noise Control and Noise Criteria (NC) Values,⁹ help ensure that sound quality within spaces, including the level of background noise levels, does not interfere with the functions of the planned courthouse areas. The choice of finishes and materials can significantly impact acoustic control.

Speech intelligibility refers to the ability of a listener to clearly understand spoken words. Unlike speech privacy, speech intelligibility is determined by the interaction of key factors that affect the ability to hear clearly and comprehend speech and sounds. Two primary determinants of acoustic performance related to speech intelligibility are the level of background noise and reverberation.

Background noise, or ambient noise, is generated by several predictable sources, the most common being movement of air for heating or cooling the room. Other sources include diffusers, fans, and the activity of people inside and outside the courtroom. Noise criteria describe the desired level of background noise.

Reverberation is measured by the time it takes for sound to subside in a room, known as the “reverberation time,” and is expressed in seconds. Excessively long reverberation times can create delays in reflected sound (echoes), compromising speech intelligibility.

For technical guidance for acoustical control and optimal NC values, refer to [Appendix A, Section A-3](#).

⁹ Noise Criterion (NC) is a standard that establishes levels to describe the relative loudness of a space within a range of frequencies. Lower NC values indicate less background noise.



Courtroom Acoustics

There are three essential criteria in addressing courtroom acoustical design: amplifying/diffusing sound, limiting reverberation, and controlling noise.

Courtroom acoustics should be clear, free of reverberations and echoes, and enhanced in the litigation area to ensure all participants can hear the proceedings clearly. Achieving acceptable acoustics requires a proper floor plan and an appropriate balance of materials to reflect, absorb, or diffuse sound. Surfaces are often used to reflect sound originating in the well area and absorb sound from the spectator areas. Generally, the front wall of the courtroom may be constructed with reflective materials to amplify sound from the well area, while the back wall should be covered with sound-absorptive materials to minimize noise and echo. The side walls should be treated as needed to either enhance or reduce sound in the well area. The floor should be finished with carpet or other sound-absorptive materials to help reduce noise.

Although much of the research on acoustics design in buildings has focused on auditoriums and concert halls, courtrooms present unique challenge due to their complex design requirements. Consulting an acoustic and audio specialist should be part of any courtroom design team.

Amplifying/Diffusing Sound

Without an electronic amplification system, speech traveling directly from an average speaker to a listener begins to fade at a distance of 25 to 40 feet. The standard courtroom is approximately 47 to 50 feet long, including the spectator area, meaning that sounds originating from the judge's bench will start to diminish near the public seating. A reflective ceiling will reinforce the intelligibility of sound.

In a courtroom, sounds are generated from multiple directions. For example, if an attorney is speaking directly to the jurors, other participants - such as the judge, court reporter, witness, opposing counsel, and public - are typically not in the direct path of the speech. While most sounds radiate in all directions, high-frequency sounds, which are narrower and more directional, need assistance to be redirected to other areas.

Limiting Reverberation

Limiting short reverberation time in a courtroom is critical for preserving speech intelligibility. A common standard for occupancy is one per 80 to 150 cubic feet (CF). However, courtrooms typically exceed this occupancy level, making it necessary to treat the space acoustically to maintain a short reverberation time. Detailed planning for acoustics should be undertaken by the architectural/engineering team in collaboration with an acoustical consultant.

The area behind the judge's bench and the two side walls should include a balanced combination of sound-reflecting and sound-absorbing surfaces. Wall surfaces should be designed to reflect sound toward the clerk, jurors, and court reporter when an attorney speaks in their direction, while the ceiling should absorb sound to reduce reflections that could impede the judge's ability to hear.

The rear of the courtroom, where the spectator area is located, should be treated as acoustically "dead," incorporating highly absorptive materials on the floors, walls, and ceiling. This treatment will minimize serious reverberation at the back, where most sound is directed, and help reduce noise generated by spectators and witnesses seated in the public area. Additionally, because most courtrooms have hard benches that are inclined, these seats could be upholstered to prevent excessive reverberation.



The ceiling design in the courtroom should be carefully studied. Inappropriate acoustical treatment can result in issues with barrel-vaulted or coffered ceilings, such as fluttering echoes or elongated sound. Floors should be carpeted to prevent the transmission of sound to the courtroom below and to absorb unwanted reflected sounds from walls and ceilings.

Controlling Noise

Sounds generated and transmitted from outside the courtroom can affect the courtroom's acoustics. Noises such as people talking in a corridor or adjoining room, footsteps on hard surfaces above, street traffic, and loud air-conditioning systems can impair acoustics and should be minimized or eliminated. However, a certain degree of low-level background noise can be beneficial if it masks distracting noises like pages turning, feet tapping, or heavy breathing, which can disrupt concentration. To protect the privacy of bench conferences in courtrooms with well-designed acoustics, sound masking or "white noise" devices may be installed in the jury area. These devices, when activated, produce sound patterns that prevent other courtroom sounds from reaching the jury.

Features such as soundproofing between courtrooms and adjacent spaces (particularly holding cells), double-door vestibules from public corridors and holding areas, and carpeting can help reduce the extraneous noise within the courtroom. Numerous sound-muffling materials are available for use in partitions, floors, and ceilings and these have been tested and rated for sound transmission by laboratories approved by the American Society for Testing Materials. The performance quality of these materials depends not only on the porosity but also on their assembly and installation properties. Sound Transmission Class (STC) ratings provide architects with a reliable measure for evaluating the soundproofing quality of walls, floors, and ceilings. In the STC classification, a higher rating indicates greater privacy in adjoining spaces. To effectively eliminate intrusive sounds in the courtroom, partitions with a high STC rating should be used.

Partitions around courtrooms should have a STC rating of 50 or higher. This is equivalent to an 8-inch concrete block wall with a one-half-inch furred gypsum board, which has an STC rating of 50. (In comparison, a wood stud wall with five-eighths-inch gypsum board and two-inch isolation blanket has an STC rating of 39.) Other areas of the courthouse that require a high STC rating include judicial chambers and jury deliberation rooms. It is important that these walls be constructed to extend from floor to floor to prevent sound transmission from adjacent rooms. To further insulate the courtroom from noise, vestibules or sound locks and conference rooms should be positioned between the courtroom and public corridor as a buffer zone. Door seals may be necessary to achieve a sound transmission rating of 50 or higher.

Minimizing Acoustical Impact of HVAC Equipment

Sound transmission and isolation features for HVAC equipment and air distribution systems should be included to minimize disruptive or annoying noises throughout the courthouse, particularly in courtrooms. Ductwork should incorporate acoustical lining and sound traps between rooms that require quiet for conversations or deliberations (e.g., jury rooms to the corridor, judges' chambers to reception). Air distribution devices, such as grills and diffusers, should be constructed using low-noise configurations.¹⁰

¹⁰ For further information, see the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers, and Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors National Association, Inc.



2.12 ERGONOMIC DESIGN

Court staff spend prolonged periods of time at their workstations and are subjected to stresses that may lead to painful, debilitating conditions. Ergonomic standards in the workplace promote productivity, safety, and health. All workstations should be designed to meet basic ergonomic requirements, such as those specified in the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) for furniture intended for computer use.

Office and furniture design should address a variety of ergonomic issues, including the type of seating, the location and placement of keyboards, mice, or other input devices, the positioning of video screens, and lighting. Adjustable chairs and desks (including sit/stand desks), well-designed keyboards, and proper lighting all contribute to the reduction of physical stress.

Workstations

- Workstations (including built-in counter workstations) should provide appropriate clearances for knees, undersides of fixed work surfaces, adjustable height work surfaces; and ADA accessibility.
- Sit/stand functionality should be provided where possible.
- Video display screens should be positioned at a comfortable viewing angle and distance. Current research suggests that the entire display should be approximately 20 degrees below the horizontal line of sight.
- The keyboard should have a slope between 0 and 25 degrees.
- Hand controls, drawer pulls, handles, knobs should provide adequate space for hands and fingers.
- Frequently used hand controls should be within easy reach and located in the operator's primary reach zone.
- Storage units should be designed with closures that minimally intrude into work activity and circulation zones.

Workstation Seating

- Chairs should accommodate a variety of seated postures.
- The angle between the seat pan and backrest should be adjustable.
- Chairs should have a five-blade base with swivel casters.
- Chairs should have an adjustable seat height so that thighs are nearly horizontal, and feet can rest flat and comfortably on the floor.
- A footrest should be provided if feet cannot rest comfortably on the floor.
- The angle between the upper and lower legs should be between 60 to 100 degrees when feet are flat on the floor or on a foot support.
- An adjustable backrest should provide support for the natural curvature of the lower back.
- A 90-degree angle between the upper and lower arm is considered "neutral," but any position between 70 and 135 degrees is acceptable.
- The wrist and forearm should be held in a straight line, with the forearm roughly parallel to the floor to reduce tendon and nerve stress.
- Wrists should be supported near the keyboard by a wrist support to help maintain a neutral (straight) arm/wrist position.



CHAPTER 3 – COURTHOUSE COMPONENTS

3.1 COURTHOUSE COMPONENTS

This chapter covers six Courthouse Component sections. Each section provides a foundational understanding of the programmatic, design, and operational criteria that are common to court facilities. These sections also illustrate how guidelines can be applied effectively to meet the unique needs of individual projects. The following are the six courthouse components covered in this Chapter 3:

- 3.2 Courtrooms, Chambers and Jury Operations
- 3.3 Clerk of Court Areas
- 3.4 Secure Courthouse Areas
- 3.5 Public Areas and Shared Building Amenities
- 3.6 Magistrate Areas
- 3.7 Court and Court-Related Agencies and Services

Section Error! Reference source not found., includes a summary of the recommended ranges of space standards, in terms of square footage for each courthouse component covered in Chapter 3.

Definition of Terms

Space Standards

Space standards represent the space needed to accommodate anticipated functions for various court and court-related areas. The standards recommended in this document are based on best practices for court facilities, drawing on examples from recent courthouse construction in Virginia and across the country. Ultimately, space requirements should be determined by analyzing current and future operational practices and should be specified in terms of square footage.

Functional Expression

Functional expression describes the accommodations necessary for daily activities and operations, including furnishings and equipment. This category also addresses the suitability of the environment for the specific court and court-related functions it supports.

Adjacency and Circulation

Adjacency refers to the spatial relationship between court or court-related functions required for effective and efficient operations. For example, are high-volume activities located on the first floor near the courthouse entrance? Are jury deliberation rooms conveniently situated near courtrooms? Circulation refers to the safe and orderly movement of people throughout the facility.

Security

Security involves the infrastructure and equipment required to maintain the safety and security of the facility for building occupants. Infrastructure and equipment should align with security operations to ensure a comprehensive security solution.

Accessibility

Accessibility refers to the ease with which judges and courthouse employees can accomplish their work and the public can navigate the facility to reach their destinations and access services. This



category includes compliance with ADA standards to ensure accessibility for individuals with disabilities.

Technology and Equipment

This category addresses the adequacy of the courthouse's technological and physical infrastructure to support its operations. Key considerations include the integration of technology within the facility, the building's design to accommodate new technologies, and the impact of the building's physical condition on the performance of its users.

3.2 COURTROOMS, CHAMBERS AND JURY OPERATIONS

Overall Planning and Design Considerations

The courtroom is the central hub of courthouse activity, providing the setting for conducting most legal proceedings. Depending on the case, the following participants may be involved in, or present during, courtroom proceedings: judge, jurors, bailiff or deputy sheriff, court reporter, clerk, attorneys, litigants, witnesses, probation personnel, media representatives, and spectators. Courtroom design must address the needs of each participant and support the smooth flow of proceedings. Together, the individual elements of courtroom design integrate to create a dignified, functional space suitable for court proceedings.

Quick Links to Topics in this Section

- [General Courtroom Planning and Design Considerations](#)
- [Courtroom Components](#)
 - [Judges Bench](#)
 - [Clerk Workstation](#)
 - [Witness Stand](#)
 - [Jury Box](#)
 - [Court Reporter](#)
 - [Counsel Tables](#)
 - [Presentation Stand](#)
 - [Public Gallery and Spectator Seating](#)
- [Courtroom Ancillary Support](#)
 - [Court Waiting Areas](#)
 - [Children and Family Waiting Areas](#)
 - [Courtroom Entry Vestibule](#)
 - [Attorney/Client Conference Rooms](#)
 - [Victim/Witness Waiting](#)
- [Judicial Chambers and Support](#)
 - [Judge Chambers](#)
 - [Court Reporter's Office](#)
- [Jury Operations](#)
 - [Jury Deliberation Room](#)



- Jury Assembly
- Grand Jury

Courtroom Types

Table 3.1: Courtroom Types

Type of Courtroom	Public Seating	Jury Box	In-Custody Holding	Area (Square Feet)
Standard Circuit	60 persons	Y	Y	1,400 – 1,600 SF
Large Circuit/Ceremonial	100 persons	Y	Y	2,000 – 2,200 SF
Standard General District	40-60 persons	N	Y	1,200 – 1,400 SF
Large General District	100-150 persons	N	Y	2,000 – 2,200 SF
Standard J & DR	30 persons	N	Y	1,000 – 1,200 SF
Large J & DR	60 persons	N	Y	1,200 – 1,400 SF
Hearing room	20 persons	N	N	1,040 SF
Magistrate Hearing Room (Refer to Section 3.6)				

Circuit Courtroom

Each independent city and county in Virginia has a Circuit Court, which is the trial court with the broadest jurisdiction in the state, handling both jury and non-jury cases. The Circuit Court handles civil cases with claims of more than \$25,000. It shares authority with the General District Court to hear matters involving claims between \$4,500 and \$25,000, and in civil cases for personal injury and wrongful death up to \$50,000. The Circuit Court has the authority to hear felonies.

Additionally, the Circuit Court also handles family matters, including divorce, and hears cases appealed from both the General District Court and the Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court.

Courts with multiple Circuit Court courtrooms may consider incorporating both standard and larger sized courtrooms in their courthouse planning projects to accommodate the wide variety of Circuit Court cases. For instance, a new courthouse might include several standard-sized courtrooms, each with a jury box and seating for up to 60 spectators, as well as a larger trial courtroom/ceremonial courtroom with seating for approximately 100 spectators. This larger courtroom can serve multiple functions, such as jury assembly and selection, ceremonial events, public and civic meetings/functions, large motions calendars, or docket calls.

General District CourtCourtroom

Each city and county in Virginia has a General District Court. General District Courts handle traffic violations, hear misdemeanor cases, and conduct preliminary felony hearings.

These courts have exclusive authority to hear civil cases with claims of \$4,500 or less and share authority with the Circuit Courts to hear cases with claims between \$4,500 and \$25,000, as well as civil cases for personal injury and wrongful death up to \$50,000. Examples of civil cases include landlord-tenant disputes, contract disputes, and debt collection suits.

Due to their high-volume caseloads, particularly for traffic and misdemeanor cases, some General District Courts may require a large, non-jury courtroom with seating capacity for 100-150 people.

In localities with staggered docketing practices, public gallery seating requirements may be smaller. A standard General District Court courtroom includes seating for 40-60 people.

Staggered docketing increasingly adopted to promote social distancing and create a less crowded environment, provides significant benefits. This practice enhances convenience to the public and



court participants, such as prosecutors, public defenders, private attorneys, and service providers, by reducing wait times for specific matters to be heard.

District Court courtrooms share many features and requirements as Circuit Court courtrooms, but as District Courts are not courts of record, they do not require jury boxes or adjacent jury deliberation rooms. For other elements, such as judges' benches, witness stands, attorney tables, prisoner holding, spectator seating, and security, District Court design should closely follow Circuit Court courtroom standards.

Although General District Courts are not courts of record, they use audio recordings for proceedings, and private attorneys may occasionally hire a court reporter to make a transcript of the proceedings.

When planning and designing new District Court courtrooms, it is important to consider potential future changes in court jurisdiction and flexibility in courtroom use. Designing versatile, 'generic' courtrooms allow for adaptation to various court functions over time. For example, a District Court courtroom can be designed with space to add a jury box if that courtroom is converted into a Circuit Court courtroom in the future.

Juvenile and Domestic Relations (J&DR) District Courtrooms

Each city and county in Virginia has a Juvenile and Domestic Relations (J&DR) District Court. In Virginia, a juvenile is any person under 18 years of age. The J&DR court hears all cases involving juveniles, including criminal and traffic matters. Juvenile delinquency cases involves minors under the age of 18 who has been accused of offenses that would be considered criminal if committed by an adult. Other juvenile offenses, known as status offenses, are acts that are unlawful only because they are committed by a minor.

Additionally, the J&DR Court handles family-related matters such as custody, support, and visitation. It also hears family abuse, cases where adults have been accused of child abuse or neglect, and criminal cases involving defendants and alleged victims who are family or household members.

J&DR Court courtrooms are generally smaller than circuit and General District Court courtrooms. While some delinquency cases and cases involving adults are open to the public, most juvenile hearings are not. Typically, only the immediate participants in the case are allowed in the courtroom, with others instructed to stay outside until called. In most J&DR Court courtrooms, a public gallery seating capacity of 25-30 is sufficient. Consequently, these courtrooms often require larger public seating and waiting areas outside the courtroom than other types of courts.

Hearing Rooms

In multi-judge courthouses and those with a J&DR Court, it is recommended to provide at least one hearing room for conducting informal hearings by judges, commissioners, special justices, or magistrates.

Hearing rooms are intended for handling minor infractions or small, private hearings. These rooms are generally informal and more private than standard courtrooms and require less space. They are particularly suitable for private juvenile and domestic matters.

Each hearing room should accommodate at least 15 people in the litigation area and have seating for approximately 10 spectators.

Magistrate Hearing Rooms

(Refer to [Section 3.6](#))



General Courtroom Planning and Design Considerations

Each courtroom should be designed and furnished to create a setting that is both dignified and functional. The courtroom's role as a hall of justice necessitates careful attention to its design and furnishings. The specific component of a courtroom will vary based on the type of court. For instance, Circuit Court courtrooms require jury boxes, while District Court courtrooms do not. J&DR District Court courtrooms generally require less spectator seating than General District Court and Circuit Court courtrooms. However, the appearance of the courtroom remains essential to maintaining public confidence and respect and should not be overlooked. Certain common elements should be incorporated into the design of all courtrooms.

Functional Expression

- The appearance and ambiance of the courtroom should be restrained and dignified. For example, designers may choose finishes that convey the solemnity of the proceedings without appearing too dark or imposing.
- Providing courtrooms with jury capability and in-custody security arrangements can increase flexibility for future needs, particularly in smaller courthouses.
- All courtroom participants should be able to hear the proceedings clearly. Acoustics should be carefully considered throughout the space, with particular attention to the litigation areas.
- Lighting in all courtrooms should be functional and appropriate for all participants. (Refer to courtroom lighting requirement in [Appendix A](#) of these Guidelines.)
- Sufficient workspace and spacing should be provided for all participants in the litigation area. Proceedings are likely to run more smoothly if participants have adequate workspace and can move about the courtroom without disruption.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Attorneys should have the freedom to approach the bench, address the clerk to file papers, speak to the jury, and question witnesses, while witnesses should have easy access to the witness stand.
- Courtroom entrances from public corridors should include a vestibule with double doors to serve as a sound-lock (refer to entrance vestibule guidelines in the Court Ancillary Support Areas section below).
- Entrances should be carefully located near the designated areas for each courtroom participant. In-custody defendants should enter from the holding area through a door located near the defense attorney's table. The judge, bailiff, clerk, court reporter, and jurors should enter via the restricted corridor through two or three doors located at the back of the courtroom, on the opposite side from spectator seating. Clerks and court staff should avoid passing behind the judge in view of the public when entering the courtroom.
- Courtrooms should be accessed from judicial chambers via a restricted corridor. Avoid configurations where chambers are directly attached to courtrooms, as this reduces the flexibility to use courtrooms as needed.

Security



- Ensure proper access control: The public should enter the courtroom from the public zone, in-custody defendants should enter through a secure zone, and judges and court staff should enter through a restricted or private zone.
- Install ballistic shielding on the judge's bench, clerk workstation, reporter workstation, and witness stand.
- Install at least one camera in each courtroom.
- Install a duress button at both the bench and clerk's workstation.
- Provide clear window panels on entrance doors to prevent collisions and allow visual oversight of the courtroom.
- Where courtroom windows allow a line of sight into the courtroom from outside the courthouse, install coverings that let light into the space while preventing views into the courtroom from the exterior.

Accessibility

- Ensuring full accessibility to all courtroom components is an important priority. The accessible path of travel to the judge's bench, clerk's workspace, witness stand, and jury box must account for recommended floor height variations. This may include ramps or other accessible provisions.
- Provide assisted listening devices in all courtrooms.

Technology and Equipment

- Ensure data and power connectivity is available for all courtroom participants. Electrical and data connection points should be ample to minimize the need for extension cords and power outlet strips. Consider providing audio reinforcement, visual evidence display, remote video participation, and courtroom environmental control systems.

Courtroom Components

Courtroom Component Summary of Recommended Space Standards

Table 3.2: Courtroom Component Summary

Component	No. Of Occupants	Area	Work Surface Width	Work Surface Depth	Height Above Floor
Judge's Bench	1	40 – 60 SF	6' – 7'	24" – 30"	12" – 21"
Clerk Workstation	1 - 2	<u>30 – 40 SF (1)</u> <u>50 – 70 SF (2)</u>	<u>5' – 6' (1-person)</u> <u>8' – 10' (2-person)</u>	24" – 30"	5" – 14"
Witness Stand	1	20 – 30 SF	3' – 5'	n/a	5 – 7""
Jury Box	14	175 – 200 SF	n/a	n/a	<u>1st Tier: 0-7"</u> <u>2nd Tier: 6-14"</u>
Court Reporter	1	15 – 20 SF	3' – 4'	24"	<u>0-7"</u>
Counsel Tables	2 – 3 (ea.)	35 – 50 SF (ea.)	6' – 8'	24" – 36"	0"
Presentation Stand	1	10 – 15 SF	24" – 36"	18" – 24"	0"



Public Gallery and Spectator Seating	Varies	5 – 8 SF /person	n/a	n/a	0”
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Judges Bench

Space Standard

Refer to [Table 3.2: Courtroom Component Summary](#).

Functional Expression

- The design of the bench should reflect the dignity of the court. It should be impressive yet functional, with a spacious work surface shielded from public view.
- The bench should allow the judge to see and hear all the people in the courtroom, and likewise, be visible and audible to all.
- Care should be taken to ensure that the height difference between the bench and witness stand does not impair the judge's view of the witness.
- The scale and height of the bench should be proportionate to the courtroom and provide the judge with an unobstructed view of the entire courtroom.
- A work surface should be included to keep paperwork and reference materials within easy reach and accommodate multiple computer monitors.
- Computer monitors should be discreet or hidden from public view. The low wall in front of the bench ("the dais") may extend approximately 6 inches above the work surface to conceal monitors, display panels, papers, and desk equipment, helping to prevent others from viewing documents on the judge's desk.
- A clear space should be available at the bench, away from the jury box, to allow for bench conferences with attorneys.
- The bench should be elevated with at least two risers (14 inches) above the floor.
- Sufficient space should be provided behind the judge's desk to allow free movement for bench conferences and for easy access in and out of the bench. Bench access must comply with ADA requirements.
- A large clock should be mounted on the wall opposite the judge's bench.
- Each bench should include a shelf to hold reference materials.

Adjacency and Circulation

- The judge's circulation path should never pass in front of the bench.
- There should be direct access from the bench to a restricted corridor leading to the judicial chambers should be provided.
- When possible, the judge should have two ways to exit the bench.

Security

- A duress alarm should be installed at the bench, allowing the judge to activate the alarm discreetly.
- The alarm should be conveniently located but positioned to avoid accidental activation.
- Ballistic shielding should be provided to protect the judge's bench.
- An additional barrier, such as a shelf or writing surface, may be added to the front of the bench to provide extra separation between the judge and participants in the litigation area.

Accessibility



- A wheelchair turnaround space with a minimum clear space of 60 inches should be provided behind the bench.
- Ramp access to the bench platform should be designed to meet ADA requirements.
- Adjustable-height work surfaces may be considered to accommodate individuals with varied physical needs.

Technology and Equipment

- Data and power connectivity should be readily accessible. The bench design should accommodate the placement of multiple computer monitors while maintaining clear sight lines for court participants. In courtrooms with advanced audio-visual systems, consider providing touch screen controls at the bench.
- Controls for AV and teleconferencing equipment are typically located at both the judge's and the clerk's stations.
- The bench should be equipped with a microphone connected to an amplifier, with control managed by either the judge or the clerk.

Clerk Workstation

Space Standard

Refer to [Table 3.2: Courtroom Component Summary.](#)

Functional Expression

- The clerk's workstation should comfortably accommodate up to (2) two clerks.
- The workstation's design should align with the general aesthetic of the Judge's bench, providing a sufficient work surface that is shielded from public view and can support up to two (2) clerks. The work surface should allow for dual monitors for each clerk and provide ample space for paperwork and files.
- An elevated front and/or side panel on the workstation may be included to screen equipment from public view and offer privacy for notetaking. This equipment may include a telephone, courtroom audiovisual and recording controls, computer, scanner, and a printer.
- As the clerk is responsible for exhibits during trials. The workstation should include adequate space for the safe storage of these materials. In addition to locking drawers within the workstation, an inconspicuous, secured closet may be provided in the courtroom for storing large items during ongoing trials.

Adjacency and Circulation

- The clerk's circulation path should not pass behind the judge's bench.
- Where appropriate, the clerk may share a courtroom entrance with the court reporter, bailiff, and jurors.
- The clerk's workstation should be adjacent to the judge's bench to facilitate private communication and transfer of paper material and evidence.
- The workstation should be elevated at least one riser above the courtroom floor to provide the clerk with an improved view of the courtroom. However, the height difference between the clerk's station and the judge should not exceed 12 inches.
- To assist with document transfer, a "pass-through" or other millwork solution may be considered.
- The clerk's station should be positioned on the same side as the bailiff and located near a doorway leading to the private corridor.
- There should be ample space between the workstation and the public gallery, as well as between the workstation and the route used by in-custody defendants.



Security

- Provide a discreet duress alarm at all clerk workstations, enabling the clerk to activate an emergency alarm system without drawing attention.
- The duress alarm should be conveniently located but positioned to prevent accidental activation.
- Equip the clerk's workstation with ballistic shielding for added protection.

Accessibility

- Ensure a wheelchair turnaround space of at least 60 inches behind the clerk workstation for clear movement.
- Provide ramp access to the clerk platform, adhering to ADA requirements.
- Consider adjustable-height work surfaces to accommodate individuals with diverse physical needs.

Technology and Equipment

- Provide access to data and power connectivity. The workstation should accommodate multiple computer monitors, scanner, and a printer.
- Equip the clerk with a phone featuring a silent ring option.
- Install a control panel for AV and recording systems.
- Provide a microphone connected to a mixer and amplifier, controllable by the judge or clerk.
- Controls for AV and recording equipment are typically located at the judge's and clerk's stations.

Witness Stand

Space Standard

Refer to [Table 3.2: Courtroom Component Summary](#).

Functional Expression

- Each courtroom should include a witness stand that is clearly visible to the judge, jurors, and litigants.
- The witness stand should be designed to comfortably accommodate the witness, an interpreter (if needed), and a wheelchair or other mobility device.
- The stand should feature an adjustable-height chair, millwork to obscure the lower body, and an area for exhibit display.
- The witness position should be raised one step above the floor level and include an ADA-compliant ramp. Where space is limited, the witness stand may be located at floor level to ensure accessibility.

Adjacency and Circulation

- The witness stand may be positioned between the judge and jury or opposite the jury box, as long as the witness has a clear view of the judge, jury box, court reporter, counsel tables, and evidence display.

Security

- Ensure separation between the spectator gallery and witness stand to prevent communication between the witness and the spectators, and to protect the witness from potential harassment.
- Equip the witness stand with ballistic shielding for added protection.



- If the witness stand is adjacent to the judge's bench, a barrier should be installed between the witness and judge position. This barrier helps define the judge and witness space and, in certain situations, could prevent a hostile witness from physically approaching the judge.

Accessibility

- Ensure that a wheelchair turnaround space of at least 60 inches be provided behind the witness stand for clear movement.
- Ensure ADA compliance if the witness stand is on a raised platform.
- Provide earphones or other assistive listening devices for hearing-impaired witnesses.

Technology and Equipment

- Ensure access to data and power connectivity at the witness stand.
- Consider installing a flat panel video display monitor at the witness stand to allow witnesses to view electronically displayed evidence.

Jury Box

Space Standard

Refer to [Table 3.2: Courtroom Component Summary](#).

Functional Expression

- Ensure clear sightlines from each juror to the witness, attorneys, judge, and evidence display areas. The jury box should not extend beyond either the witness stand or the attorneys' tables.
- Provide a front modesty panel to separate the jury box from the litigation area, obscuring the view of jurors' lower bodies. Side modesty panels on the spectator gallery side of the jury box may also be included.
- The jury box must provide ample space to accommodate jurors and alternates, and should be equipped with fixed, comfortable swivel chairs with armrests.
- Design the jury box to seat 14 jurors in two tiers, with overall dimensions approximately 8'x18'.
- Tiers: Where spacing permits, both tiers of the jury box should be elevated to improve jurors' view of court proceedings and emphasize their role as officers of the court. The first tier may be raised one step above floor level with ADA-compliant ramp access, and the second tier may be raised an additional step. In cases where space is limited, such as in remodeled courtrooms, the first row may be located at floor level to accommodate accessibility needs.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Provide access from the jury box to a jury deliberation room via a restricted corridor. Ideally, this access should be direct so that jurors do not need to pass in front of the bench or litigant tables.
- Position the jury box as far away as logically possible from the nearest attorneys' table.

Security

- Maintain separation between the spectator gallery and the jury box to prevent communication between jurors and the spectators and to protect against possible harassment. A minimum distance of 6 feet between the jury box and the spectator area railing is recommended.

Accessibility

- Design the jury box to accommodate individuals with disabilities, providing clear maneuvering and turnaround space.
- Ensure ADA-compliant ramp access if wheelchair spaces are positioned on a raised platform.



- Provide an assistive listening system for jurors with hearing impairments.

Technology and Equipment

- Ensure access to data and power connectivity in the jury box.
- Position a microphone near the foreperson's position in the jury box.
- Mount a large-screen video monitor on the opposite side of the courtroom for evidence viewing. Alternatively, individual monitors may be installed in the jury box.

Court Reporter

Most courts in Virginia use contract court reporters who provide their own equipment. The configuration of the court reporter's space will depend on the specific court reporting method used. Although General District and J&DR District Courts in Virginia are not considered "courts of record," courtrooms in these courts also should include court reporter stations. This accommodation is necessary because attorneys may occasionally wish to provide their own reporters to create a transcript.

Space Standard

Refer to [Table 3.2: Courtroom Component Summary](#).

Functional Expression

- Reporter workstations should be moveable and include a work surface at least 24 inches deep, with a lockable drawer for storage.
- Each reporter workstation assemblies should include millwork or a modesty panel to obscure the lower body.
- The millwork of the reporter workstation should match the general appearance of the judge's bench and clerk workstation.
- The workstation should be capable of accommodating devices required for digital recording if needed.
- The court reporter should also have an unobstructed view of the entire litigation area, including the judge, witness stand, jury box, and attorney's table.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Position court reporter workstations so that all participants can be clearly heard by the court reporter.
- Provide access from the reporter station to the restricted corridor.
- Ensure clear sightlines to the judge, witness, and attorneys.

Security

- Equip the reporter workstation with ballistic shielding for added protection.

Accessibility

- Design the reporter station to accommodate persons with disabilities, providing clear maneuvering and turnaround space.

Technology and Equipment

- Ensure access to data and power connectivity. Consider flush-mounted floor boxes to avoid excessive running of data and power cabling across the litigation area floor.
- Provide a silent printer in the courtroom for producing transcripts when needed.

Counsel Tables



Space Standard

Refer to [Table 3.2: Courtroom Component Summary](#).

Functional Expression

- General District and Circuit Court courtrooms should be designed to accommodate at least two tables,
- (J&DR District Court courtrooms should have up to four counsel tables to support the multiple parties commonly involved in J&DR cases.
- Modesty panels should be integrated into the tables at the front and sides to conceal the lower body, with additional panels at defense tables to conceal restraint devices.
- Tables should be positioned so that individuals seated at them are fully visible to the judge, court reporter and jury. Space permitting, tables should ideally be placed five feet apart and eight feet from the nearest juror or spectator to maintain privacy in conversations.
- Each table should comfortably accommodate at least two people, with some tables designed to seat up to four, including the litigants or defendant. There should be adequate space for a microphone, laptop, and documents.
- For cases with large numbers of participants, an additional row of chairs or a bench behind each table, positioned just in front of the spectator rail, should be considered.

Defense Counsel Tables

- In courtrooms used for criminal trials, the counsel table reserved for defendants should be located near the entrance to the secure holding facilities.
- To enhance security for detained individuals and those in the courtroom, the distance between this entry and the defense table should be minimized.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Tables should be positioned to ensure a clear view of the judge, jury, witness, and court reporter.
- Tables should be located to allow counsel a clear pathway to the bench, witness stand, jury box, clerk's station, and lectern.

Defense Counsel Tables

- Defendants in custody should enter the courtroom from restricted passages connected to the prisoner holding facilities.
- The defense counsel table should not be positioned directly across from the witness stand.
- The defendant should avoid passing the jury box, the judge's bench, or through the spectator area en route to the defense counsel table.

Security

- For security reasons, tables should not have drawers or a recess underneath the tabletop.
- Refer to [Section 3.3](#) for secure courtroom adjacencies and holding requirements.

Accessibility

- Tables should be designed to accommodate individuals with disabilities, providing clear maneuvering and turnaround space.

Technology and Equipment

- Ensure access to data and power connectivity. Consider using flush-mounted floor boxes to minimize cabling across the litigation area floor.

Presentation Stand



Space Standard

Refer to [Table 3.2: Courtroom Component Summary](#).

Functional Expression

- The presentation stand should be movable and height-adjustable, with rolling castors as a consideration for ease of movement.
- The stand should be floor-supported (not mounted on the tabletop) and include a shelf with space for a gooseneck microphone and an attorney's laptop.
- The stand should be integrated with courtroom technology and presentation systems.
- Floor receptacles should be included to provide data and power connectivity.

Adjacency and Circulation

- The front of the stand should be clearly visible by the judge, jury, witness, and court reporter.

Security

- The presentation stand should be positioned at a safe distance from the judge's bench.

Accessibility

- The stand should be designed to accommodate individuals with disabilities, with clear maneuvering and turnaround space provided.

Technology and Equipment

- Ensure access to data and power connectivity. Consider using flush-mounted floor boxes to minimize cabling across the litigation area floor.

Public Gallery and Spectator Seating

Most trials are open members of the public who wish to observe trials and hearings have a right to both see and hear the proceedings, with appropriate seating accommodations. The spectator area should be separated from the litigation area to control movement and reinforce the hierarchy of courtroom participants.

Space Standard

- Allocate approximately 8-10 square feet per spectator.

Functional Expression

- All spectator areas should be separated from the litigation area to control movement and maintain the hierarchy of participants. The separation barrier can be constructed of millwork or a predesigned partition, and it should include an opening with a minimum clear width of 44 inches or a double swing leaf gate which provides 32 inches clear space for accessibility.
- Seating options may include bench-style seating with backs or individual performance hall-style seats. Bench seating may be preferable for low maintenance and maximum capacity, while individual performance hall seating provides more comfort for spectators.
- In courtrooms designed for jury trials, courtroom spectator areas should be sized to accommodate the typical voir-dire panel for civil court jury selection. Limited jurisdiction courtrooms may be sized to accommodate the typical number of people scheduled on a regular basis.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Public entry to the spectator area should be from the public corridor and through a courtroom entry vestibule to minimize noise.



Security

- Maintain separation between the spectator gallery and the jury box to prevent communication between jurors and the spectators and to protect against potential harassment. A minimum distance of 6 feet between the jury box and the spectator area railing is recommended.
- Avoid using folding or temporary chairs that could be removed and potentially used as weapons. Public seating should be securely fastened to the floor.

Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair spaces, companion seating, and semi-ambulatory seating in ratios required by law. Wireless hearing assistance devices should be available for all court spectators and participants.

Technology and Equipment

- Electrical outlet access may be installed under the first row of seating in large courtrooms to accommodate media access.

Courtroom Ancillary Support

Court Waiting Areas

Court facilities must include public waiting areas with access to drinking fountains and restrooms, located in or near courtrooms and offices where the public conducts business. To be effective, these waiting areas should be designed to accommodate the court's busiest days. Large numbers of people without adequate waiting space can lead to confusion within the courthouse and pose security and safety concerns.

Refer to [Section 3.3](#) for details on clerk reception and queuing areas.

Space Standard

- Courtroom waiting areas are generally not enclosed or clearly defined, and their size will vary based on the volume and occupancy of court proceedings.
- Public circulation corridors in front of courtrooms should be sized to accommodate adequate waiting areas, creating "wide spots" for benches or other designated spaces for conversation and waiting. Typically, a width of 10 to 14 feet is appropriate.

Functional Expression

- General District Courts, due to their large misdemeanor and traffic calendars, typically require more public waiting space than Circuit Courts.
- Circuit Courts generally require less waiting space, where smaller hallways with seating areas may be suitable.
- Waiting areas should provide seating without obstructing traffic patterns. In addition to a lobby area near the main entrance, wide hallways or designated waiting rooms with comfortable seating should be planned near courtrooms, where visitors can wait, and attorneys can meet with their clients.
- Waiting space needs vary by court type. J&DR District Courts require larger waiting areas, as seating within the courtroom is generally restricted to hearing participants, with others waiting outside. This differs from General District and Circuit Courts, where people often wait for their hearing in the courtroom.



- A public address system should be considered to help people know when to move from waiting areas to courtrooms at appropriate times.
- To be effective, waiting areas should be designed to handle peak court days, as overcrowding can lead to confusion and present security and safety issues.
- Efforts should be made to minimize noise transmission from waiting areas into courtrooms.
- Where possible, natural lighting should be incorporated into waiting areas.
- Corridors may serve as public waiting areas if they are wide enough for bench seating and a vestibule with a sound lock is provided at courtroom entrances.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Public restrooms and water fountains should be conveniently located in or near these areas.

Security

- Security camera coverage should be provided in lobby areas.
- For specific proceedings, such as high-profile trials, additional security measures may be necessary. Separate screening equipment can be set up to re-screen courtroom participants for weapons before they are admitted into the courtroom.
- As noted above, large crowds without adequate waiting areas can create confusion and pose security and safety concerns. Ample public waiting space should be provided to help separate opposing parties, especially in domestic cases.

Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround space.

Technology and Equipment

- Access to data and power connectivity should be provided throughout waiting areas.

Children and Family Waiting Areas

Space Standard

- Children and Family Waiting Area: Typically ranges from 150-350 square feet and accommodates a minimum of four individuals. Larger courthouses may provide more extensive children and family waiting areas based on anticipated usage.
- Additional space should be considered for a protected witness in cases where it is in the best interest of a child not to be near the defendant.

Functional Expression

- Children and family waiting areas should be designed to create a safe and calming environment. The design should incorporate 'trauma-informed' design principles to minimize stress triggered by the environment. Examples include comfortable furniture, access to natural light and views, and interior finishes that promote a calming environment.
- These rooms should be equipped with lounge seating, television monitors for remote courtroom viewing and interviews, children's toys and games, and, ideally, a unisex restroom.
- Soundproofing should be installed between the family waiting rooms and other areas to ensure privacy and minimize noise.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Children and family waiting areas should be located off the public corridor, near the courtrooms.
- The waiting areas should connect to the main public lobby and court waiting areas but be designed with some separation from high- traffic areas.



- Public restrooms, lactation rooms, public telephones and/or charging stations, and water fountains, should be conveniently located within or near these areas. Basic first-aid services may also be provided.

Security

- Access should be controlled to prevent mixing with the general public.

Accessibility

- Ensure sufficient space for wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround space throughout the waiting room.

Technology and Equipment

- When planning and furnishing these spaces, consideration should be given to minimizing noise transmission from the waiting area to the courtroom.
- These spaces may also be used for remote and secure viewing of court proceedings and should be equipped with appropriate audiovisual (A/V) to support this function.

Courtroom Entry Vestibule

Space Standard

- The courtroom entry vestibule should be sized between 64 and 80 square feet.
- The distance between the set of doors in the entry vestibule is regulated by life safety code requirements; however, a distance of 8 to 10 feet is generally recommended.

Functional Expression

- The courtroom public entrance vestibule serves as a transition between the courtrooms and public circulation areas, helping to block noise from the adjacent corridor.
- Typically, the vestibule consists of two sets of doors.
- Glass panels should be installed in the doors from the vestibule into the courtroom to allow viewing of proceedings and monitoring by security personnel.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Attorney / client conference rooms may open off the public corridor or from the vestibule. It is preferable to have conference rooms open off the main public corridor to allow for flexible use of the conference spaces.

Security

- The public entrance should be lockable to provide security when the court is not in session.
- Security cameras should be provided within the vestibule if transparent glass doors from courtroom into entry vestibule are not installed.

Accessibility

- The vestibule should permit easy passage of a wheelchair and ample turning radius.

Attorney/Client Conference Rooms

Space Standard

- Attorney/client conference rooms may vary in size from 80 SF – 120 SF.

Functional Expression



- Conference rooms should be provided for Circuit and J&DR District Court courtrooms. They may be considered optional for General District Court courtrooms.
- Two publicly accessible conference rooms should be provided for every courtroom to ensure access by each party.
- These conference rooms are primarily used by attorneys meeting with their clients but may also serve as spaces for victims/witness waiting and interviews (Refer to description of Victim/Witness Waiting below).
- Rooms should be furnished with a small conference table and chairs. They may be used flexibly as media rooms for reporters and media or as an ad-hoc waiting room for victims or witnesses.
- The conference rooms should be acoustically isolated (Refer to Technical Guidelines for Acoustics in [Appendix A](#)).

Adjacency and Circulation

- Attorney/client conference rooms may be accessible from the public corridor or may be reached through the courtroom entry vestibule if access can be provided but controlled when the courtroom is not occupied.

Security

- Consider the use of glass panes in door and or side-lite windows so that persons inside the room can be observed while maintaining acoustic privacy.
- Consider provision of a duress alarm within attorney/client conference rooms.

Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround space.

Technology and Equipment

- Access to data and power connectivity should be provided.
- The conference rooms may be equipped with PA speakers so users can hear public announcements.
- Consideration should be given to providing A/V equipment including wall mounted video monitor.

Victim/Witness Waiting rooms

Space Standard

- Varies from 120-220 SF and accommodates a minimum of four individuals.

Functional Expression

- A victim/witness waiting room, located off the public corridor near the courtrooms, may be provided for victims and/or witnesses to wait before court appearances and during recesses. The space can also be used for secure, remote viewing of court proceedings.
- Victim/witness waiting rooms should be provided in all Circuit, General District, and J&DR District Court courtrooms. Attorney/client conference rooms may also serve as victim/witness waiting rooms if needed.
- These rooms should be designed to isolate them from courtroom sounds and activities and should be soundproofed. (Refer to Technical Guidelines for Acoustics in [Appendix A](#))
- The design should promote a safe and calming environment.
- Lounge-style seating and television monitor(s) for remote courtroom viewing are recommended.



- A unisex restroom should be considered to ensure that victims and witnesses have an alternative to the general public restrooms.

Adjacency and Circulation

- The waiting room should be accessible from the public corridor but with some separation from high-traffic areas. Access should be controlled to limit or restrict opportunities for victims and witnesses to interact with the general public.

Security

- Consider the provision of a duress alarm within the waiting room.

Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround space.
- If applicable, restrooms should be accessible.

Technology and Equipment

- Access to data and power connectivity should be provided.

Judicial Chambers and Support

Judge Chambers

Judge chambers serve as the personal office and conference areas for judges. Typical activities conducted in chambers include general business correspondence, legal study, preparation of opinions and judgments, preparation for upcoming hearings, review of case filings and records, and meetings with court staff and attorneys. Chambers should be spacious enough to comfortably accommodate several visitors, as active cases may be discussed and decided in these areas.

Furnishings in individual chambers may include a desk, work surface, bookcases, side chairs, and a small conference table. Provisions may also be made for the installation of video conferencing equipment.

The design and configuration of chambers can vary widely depending on the court's size and physical layout. In some cases, individual chambers are located near specific courtrooms, accessible via a restricted corridor. In other cases, chambers may be clustered together in a shared environment, which fosters collegiality among judges and allows for flexible use of courtroom space and support staff resources. Examples of collegial configurations include penthouse floor chambers, multi-floor (dispersed) chambers pods, and split courtrooms and chambers on separate floors.

One or more additional chambers should be provided for visiting judges who are not regularly assigned to the court.

Support space should be provided for judicial assistants, law clerks, staff attorneys and court clerks in an open office environment. In a clustered setting, various open office design strategies can be considered. In addition to the required staff workstations, chambers support areas across all facilities should include:

- A secure reception area for attorneys or other public visitors to access the chambers suite; this space may be consolidated in a clustered (collegial) chambers environment.
- Flexible work areas to accommodate printers, scanners, copiers, fax machines, and supplies.



- A small galley in decentralized chambers or a multi-purpose judicial break room/informal meeting area in clustered or collegial chambers.
- One or more judicial conference rooms located in or near chambers for judges to address short matters close to their chambers.
- Shared judicial staff restrooms accessible via the restricted circulation corridor.
- Typical support staff requirements for the various judge levels:

Table 3.3: Judicial Chambers: Recommended Space Standards		
	No. Of Support Staff	Judges' Chambers Area
Circuit Judge	3	300 – 380 SF
District Judge	3	250 – 325 SF
Magistrate	Refer to section 3.5	
Visiting Judge	Up to 2	250 – 325 SF

Space Standard

- The typical Circuit Court judge's chambers are approximately 300 - 380 SF. This does not include space for support staff, work areas, break areas or restrooms.
- The typical district judge's chambers are approximately 250 - 325 SF. This does not include space for support staff, work areas, break areas or restrooms.
- Private restroom: Generally, 49 - 56 SF.
- Reception/secretary office: 150-200 SF.
- Law Clerk: 100-120 SF.
- Bailiff: 80-100 SF.

Functional Expression

- There should be a private office for each resident judge in the courthouse.
- Each judicial chambers area should have a secured, controlled entrance from public circulation where attorneys and other visitors can be identified. This may be done by a bailiff, security officer, or judicial secretary or other staff person.
- The office should accommodate the judge's desk and workspace, files, personal library, an informal conference area for at least four individuals, coat storage and a restroom.
- The chambers should be designed with a private restroom. If chambers are clustered, space may be conserved, and costs reduced by providing shared executive restrooms (male and female) to be shared among judges and separate shared restrooms (male and female) for staff.
- The office should accommodate informal conferences between the judge and attorneys and court staff.
- Each Circuit Court judge's chamber should be equipped with space for a judicial secretary.
- The secretary's office should be located outside and adjacent to the judge's private office and should also serve as the visitor reception area.
- Environmental controls for the office should be located within the chambers.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Judges should be able to enter and exit the courthouse inconspicuously via a dedicated restricted entrance.
- Restricted horizontal and vertical circulation should be provided from the judges' parking area to the judges' chambers.



- No chambers should be directly attached to any courtroom; instead, judges should have easy access to multiple courtrooms via the restricted circulation zone.

Security

- Provide silent duress alarm buttons in all chambers.
- Minimize windows with direct line of sight from public accessed spaces on the building exterior to prevent observation of activities, threat exposure, or communication with courthouse occupants.
- Where chambers windows provide a line of sight into chambers from outside the courthouse, provide coverings on the windows positioned to let light in but to prevent a view into chambers from outside the courthouse. Also, consideration should be given to applying security film (attack-rated) and/or tinting to windows, or in the case of significant risk and where feasible, replacing windows with ballistic-rated glazing. All ground floor windows should be attack rated at a minimum.

Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround space.

Technology and Equipment

- Data and power connectivity should be provided in all chambers.

Court Reporter's Office

Most courts in Virginia make use of audio recording systems or free-lance court reporters and offices for a court reporter are generally not included in the courthouse. Where court reporters are part of the court's staff, however, each reporter should have a private office in which to transcribe their notes or tapes and store their equipment. In courts that make use of freelance reporters, consideration may be given to providing the reporters with space in which to work prior to court and during court recesses. This is optional on the part of the local governing body.

Space Standard

- Reporter office: 120 SF

Functional Expression

- Space should be provided for a desk, personal computer with video display monitor and storage cabinets to hold the reporter's notes or tapes or other storage devices.

Adjacency and Circulation

- If provided, offices should be located with easy access to the courtrooms so that the reporters can quickly move back and forth as required.

Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround space.

Technology and Equipment

- Data and power connectivity should be provided.

Jury Operations

Jury Deliberation Room

Space Standard



- Varies depending on size of jury panel. Approximately 300 - 350 SF is typical for a 12-person panel. (Assumes 25 sf per juror)
- Restrooms: 49-56 SF (one each male and female)
- Vestibule: 50-60 SF
- Coffee Bar: 25 SF
- Coat Closet: 10 SF

Functional Expression

- The number of jury deliberation areas required is typically determined based on the number of jury trials occurring within the courthouse. In courthouses with multiple courtrooms, it is not uncommon for jury deliberation spaces to be shared.
- In large courthouses with several Circuit Court courtrooms, it may not be necessary to have one jury deliberation room for every jury courtroom. A ratio of one jury deliberation room per two or three courtrooms may be sufficient depending upon the frequency of jury trials.
- Smaller courts with infrequent needs for jury deliberation may wish to enlarge the jury deliberation room so that it may also serve as a grand jury room or other type of conference space.
- During breaks in jury trial proceedings and upon the completion of a jury trial, jurors are escorted from the courtroom to a jury deliberation room. Depending on the nature of the case, jury deliberations may last only a few minutes, or many days; therefore, deliberation rooms must be comfortable, well-ventilated, and designed to minimize the stress on jurors. If possible, deliberation rooms should be located on exterior walls to allow access to natural light and views.
- The deliberation room should be equipped with a conference table, a whiteboard, exhibits, and video presentation system.
- Each deliberation room should ideally be accompanied by a vestibule providing access to restrooms (one each for male and female if possible), a coffee bar, sink with counter, and a coat closet. The restrooms should be acoustically separated from the deliberation room. The toilet rooms should be positioned so that the doors open from the vestibule. The toilet room door should be oriented to provide reasonable privacy.
- Ensure confidentiality through soundproofing provided at all perimeter walls, doors, and ceiling (See Technical Guidelines for Acoustics in Appendix A). The room should not have vented doors or transoms and should not adjoin the attorney conference or witness waiting rooms.
- Lighting: Deliberation rooms should be well lit (See Appendix A for recommended illumination levels.)

Adjacency and Circulation

- Deliberation rooms should be located near the jury courtrooms accessed via a restricted corridor. Jurors will move through the facility using the restricted horizontal and vertical circulation system.
- If the jury deliberation room is located on the ground floor of the courthouse, it should not have windows that would allow someone from outside to look into the room or from which jurors could view demonstrations or persons outside the courthouse. Windows on the first floor, if any, should be high and should not open onto public areas to prevent people outside the courthouse from hearing the deliberations.

Security

- Consider the provision of a duress alarm within the deliberation room.
- There may be a security station outside the jury deliberation room.
- A signaling system may be installed so jurors are able to alert someone of any special needs or questions.



Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround space.
- Restrooms should be accessible.

Technology and Equipment

- Data and power connectivity should be provided.
- Jurors should have the ability to review digital evidence, both audio and video, within the deliberation room and consideration may be given for provision of a flat panel display.

Jury Assembly

Space Standard

- The orientation area requires assembly type seating, for example rows of stackable chairs and should be large enough to seat all prospective jurors. This type of seating arrangement requires 8-10 SF per juror.
- For jury lounges provided as a part of the jury assembly area, a variety of different seating and furniture options may be provided including reading and work carrels, table seating, and casual seating. This type of seating arrangement requires 20 to 25 SF per person.

Functional Expression

Components of Jury Assembly Area:

- Check-in area
- Jury orientation/assembly room
- Jury lounge
- Jury restroom(s)
- Break area/coffee bar
- Jury management staff area
- Audio/visual equipment area
- In larger jurisdictions where several jury trials may be held on the same day, the size of the jury pool may be large, requiring special facilities to accommodate them.
- In small and rural courthouses where the number of jury trials is limited no special facilities may be required other than a large Circuit Court courtroom.
- Where the jury assembly room is not needed full-time, the room should be adaptable to other uses such as larger conferences, meetings, or training programs.
- Juror assembly amenities may include a break room furnished with café tables and a large flexible conference and training space/juror overflow space. This space could be flexibly arranged to suit multiple settings and can be used to accommodate the large group meeting needs of the various building user groups, or alternatively, the space can accommodate situations where an especially high volume of jurors is anticipated.

Adjacency and Circulation

- The juror assembly area should be located in a readily visible and easily accessible area of the courthouse with access controlled through a juror check-in area. This will enhance public wayfinding and reduce wear and tear on the building.

Security

- It is important to isolate the jurors from the general public to discourage the potential for a juror to overhear potentially prejudicial information from trial participants or observers in the



hallways or other areas of the Court. For this same reason, dedicated juror restrooms should be provided within the assembly area.

- The juror assembly area should be accessed from the public hallway but should also be connected to the restricted circulation zone to allow for movement of jurors away from the public.

Accessibility

- Assistive listening devices should be available for hearing impaired persons.
- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround space.
- Rest rooms should be accessible.

Technology and Equipment

- Data and power connectivity should be provided at the juror check-in counter.
- Consideration may be given to provision of a large video projection screen or flat screen television near the presentation podium; or multiple viewing stations throughout the assembly area can facilitate effective juror orientation without having to keep all jurors in the same room.
- Consider providing charging stations for jurors to use for their personal devices.
- If possible, consider providing Wi-Fi access for jurors waiting in the assembly area.

Grand Jury

The primary responsibility of the grand jury is to determine whether the Commonwealth's Attorney has sufficient evidence to prosecute a suspect. The grand jury consists of five to seven individuals and typically convenes for several days each month.

A special grand jury, composed of seven to eleven citizens, may be convened by the Circuit Court to investigate criminal activities. Special grand juries are usually impaneled in the courtroom by the judge and meet to hear evidence presented by prosecution witnesses. Indictments are typically submitted to the judge in open court.

Present in the grand jury room are the witness, the court reporter, and, at certain times, the prosecuting attorney.

Space Standard

- 265-400 SF.

One jury deliberation room in each Circuit Court courthouse should be designed to accommodate grand juries. In the largest Circuit Courts, where grand juries regularly meet during each term of court, consideration may be given to providing a room dedicated solely to the grand jury's use.

Functional Expression

- Grand jury activities primarily include determinations for prosecutions and investigations. No judge is present during grand jury activities except at the conclusion of hearings. When not in use by a grand jury, this room can be used by judicial staff and officers to conduct conferences, training, and informal hearings.
- Lighting: Grand jury rooms should be well lit (recommended illumination level: 30 – 40 foot candles. See additional lighting criteria in Appendix A)

Adjacency and Circulation

- Grand jury areas should ensure confidentiality through soundproofing, controlled circulation, and supervision by court staff.



- The grand jury area should be accessed via the public circulation zone but should be located in a discreet, low-volume area.
- The grand jury room should be a private, secure room, and may be located near the Commonwealth's Attorney's office.
- A witness waiting room should be provided adjacent to the grand jury room. Provide acoustic separation so that conversations in the grand jury room are not heard in the witness waiting room.

Security

- Provide a duress alarm within the grand jury room.

Accessibility

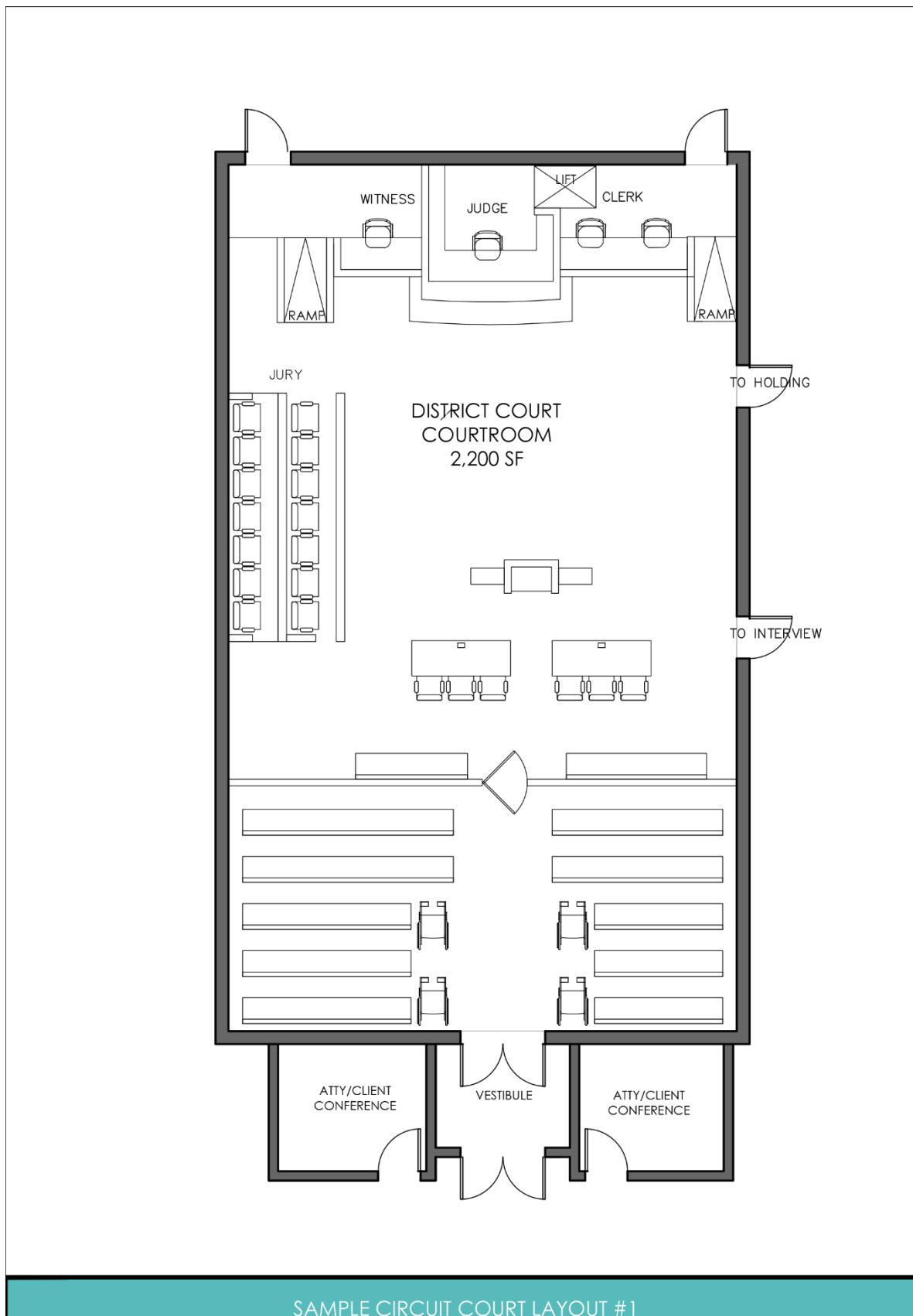
- Assistive listening devices should be available for hearing impaired persons.
- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround space.
- Restrooms should be accessible.

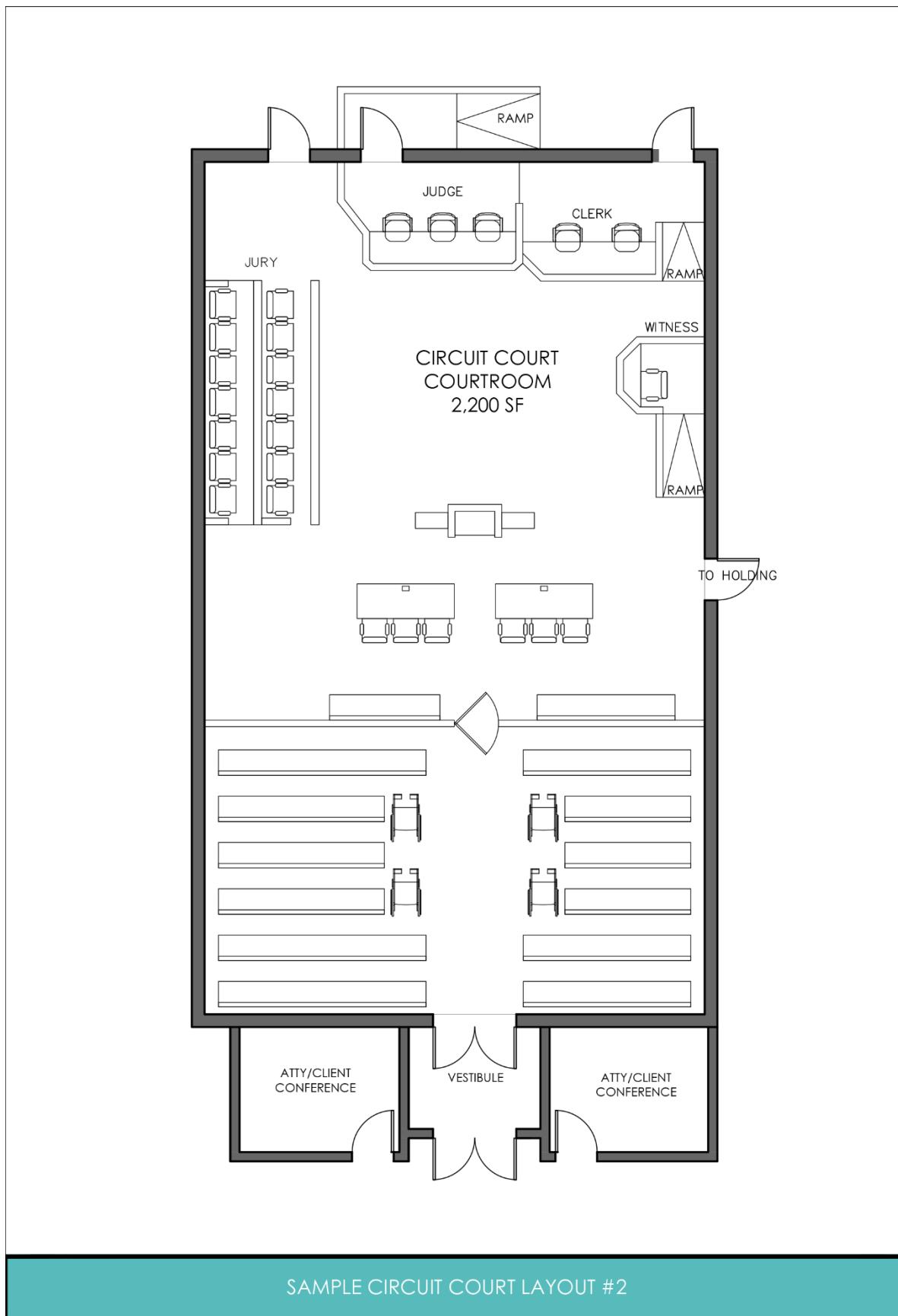
Technology and Equipment

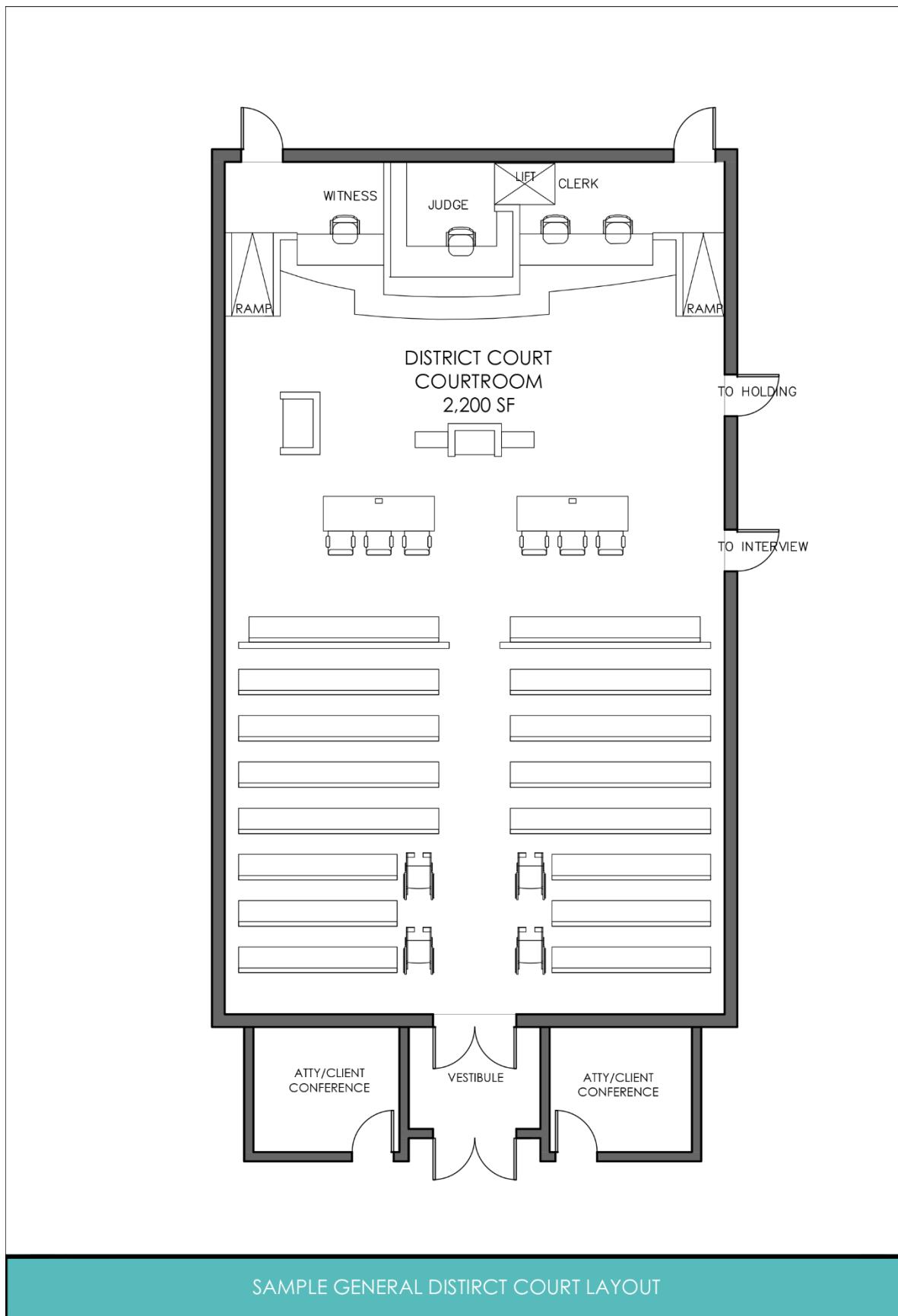
- Data and power connectivity should be provided in the grand jury room. Consideration may be given to the provision of a large video projection screen or flat screen television for the presentation of evidence.

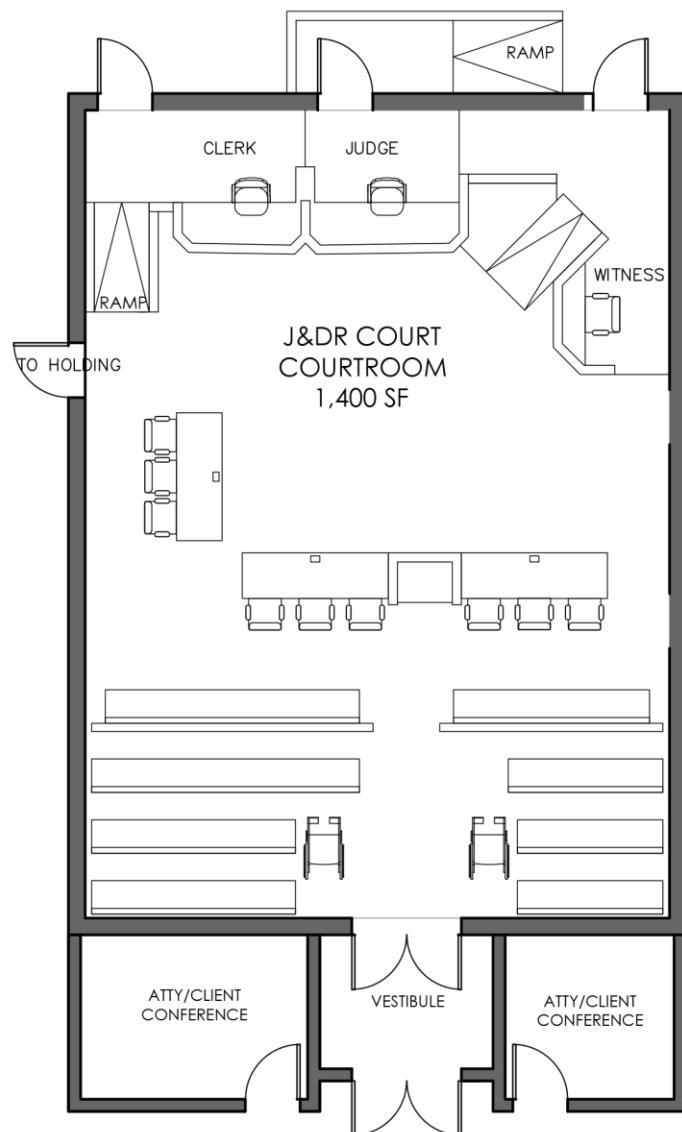
Sample Courtroom Layouts

The following sample courtroom layouts (next page) are provided for reference to illustrate possible courtroom configurations of Circuit Court Courtrooms, General District Courtrooms, and Juvenile and Domestic Relations Courtrooms.









SAMPLE JUVENILE AND DOMESTIC RELATIONS COURT LAYOUT



3.3 CLERK OF COURT AREAS

Clerk Types

Separate Clerk's offices serve the Circuit and District Courts. However, in some cases, the Clerks' offices for certain General District and J&DR District Courts in Virginia may be combined. The Circuit Court Clerk is an elected official, while the Clerks of the two District Courts are appointed state employees within the Virginia judicial system. In smaller jurisdictions, the two District Court Clerks' offices (i.e., General District Court Clerk and J&DR District Court Clerk) may be consolidated under a single Clerk.

Circuit Court Clerk

Circuit Court Clerks are responsible for all business operations and record-keeping functions of the Circuit Court. In support of judicial activities, the Clerk receives and processes pleadings and documents to initiate court cases, as well as all subsequent filings related to ongoing litigation. Clerks also collect all court fees and fines. The number and scope of functions performed by each Clerk's office vary based on the court's jurisdiction and the size of the Clerk's staff, which may range from two or three employees to over 100.

In addition to providing direct administrative support to judges during court proceedings, Circuit Court Clerks in Virginia are responsible for non-court-related recording functions, such as recording deeds, probating wills and estates, and issuing marriage licenses. These records must be received, processed, indexed, securely stored, and made conveniently accessible to the public. Circuit Court Clerks also take custody of all election ballots after certification by local election officials.

Furthermore, Circuit Court Clerks manage jury operations, including the issuance of juror questionnaires to establish a jury pool. (Refer to [Chapter 3, Section 3.1](#) for facilities guidelines related to jury operations, including jury assembly areas.)

General District Court Clerk & Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court Clerk

The General District Court is a high-volume court that handles large numbers of traffic and misdemeanor cases. In contrast, the J&DR District Court deals with matters involving children and families. Many J&DR records are confidential and require secure, locked storage.

Like Circuit Court Clerks, General District and J&DR Court Clerks are responsible for all business operations and record-keeping functions of their respective courts. In support of judicial activities, clerks receive and process pleadings and documents to initiate court cases, as well as all subsequent filings related to ongoing litigation. Clerks also collect all court fees and fines.

The scope and volume of functions performed by each Clerk's office depend on the court's jurisdiction and the size of its staff, which can range from two or three employees to over 100. It is important to note that there are several combined District Courts in Virginia, meaning the J&DR District Court and the General District Court are managed out of one Clerk's office for the jurisdiction. JDR and General District Court judges presiding in a combined District Court may request the Committee on District Courts split these courts if certain conditions are met. One condition of this request is the separation of Clerks' offices. These guidelines provide information for the facilities requirements for each office, in particular, the need to have secured office space for juvenile and domestic relations court staff and records. Secure facilities for both Clerks' offices are required.



Overall Planning and Design Considerations

Location of Clerk Offices in the Courthouse

It is common practice to locate each Clerk's office near the court it serves, ideally on the same floor as the respective courtrooms. This proximity facilitates the clerks' ability to service the courtrooms and simplifies fine payments immediately after court proceedings. In cases where the Clerk's office is separated from the courtroom, particularly for General District Court clerks, a dedicated fine payment window staffed during court hours may be placed adjacent to the courtroom. This arrangement makes it more convenient for individuals to pay fines before leaving court.

General District Court clerks and Juvenile J&DR Court clerks typically experience higher volumes of foot traffic compared to Circuit Court clerks. As such, their offices should be prioritized for placement on the first floor to minimize foot traffic to higher levels of the courthouse. Alternatively, it may be beneficial to locate all Clerks' offices together on a single floor, offering greater convenience for the public, attorneys, and litigants conducting business with multiple clerk offices. Such a layout also enables the clerks to share common support spaces, such as restrooms, break areas, and conference facilities.

Regardless of the floor location, Clerks' offices should be prominently visible and easily accessible to the public. Additionally, their location should ensure convenient staff access to courtrooms and other key areas of the courthouse.

Clerk Digital Court Service Environment

As courts transition from paper-based operations to a digital-based court service environment with digital record and information management systems, the architectural design of clerks' offices should reflect the evolving requirements of these initiatives. Future operational planning objectives and corresponding office requirements should consider the following:

- The adoption of electronic filing and case management systems will eliminate many physical constraints associated with paper files and manual processes. This shift allows for a more flexible service framework in the design of new court buildings. Future e-court operations may alter office workflows and impact space adjacency relationships within or between work units or divisions. Staff workspace planning should prioritize flexible, open-office environments to enable clerks to adjust staff assignments and adapt to evolving service demands.
- The expansion of online business transactions is expected to enhance productivity and service capacity over time. Clerk offices should consider broadening public interface operations by integrating digital and online service portals with in-person services. As e-court operations reduce the volume of public visitors to the courthouse, the number of physical transaction counters required will likely decrease compared to paper-based operations.

Space Planning and Design Components

Quick Links to Topics in this Section

- [Private Offices](#)
- [Open Office Workstations](#)
- [Public Counter Workstations](#)
- [Clerk Reception and Waiting](#)
- [Office Support Spaces and Amenities](#)
- [Record Storage](#)



- Public Records Review Areas
- Exhibit Storage

Private Offices

Space Standard

- Private offices are generally reserved for the Clerks of the various courts and for staff who conduct in-office supervisory conferences and need private space for discussing confidential or sensitive matters
- At a minimum, private offices are required for the following:
 - The elected Circuit Court Clerk (300- 380 square feet)
 - As a constitutionally elected official, the Circuit Court clerk may be afforded a slightly larger office, similar to that of a Circuit Court judge.
 - The General District Court Clerk (180-240 square feet)
 - The J&DR District Court Clerk (180-240 square feet)
- Where feasible, private offices should also be provided for deputy clerks and managers (120 - 160 square feet)
- Based on available space and the operational needs of the Clerk's office, supervisors may require private offices (100 – 120 square feet). In other cases, supervisors work in open office workstations near the staff they supervise (refer to space standards for open office workstations).

Functional Expression

- The Circuit Court Clerk's private office should include space for a desk and workspace, files, personal library, an informal conference area for at least four individuals, coat storage and a restroom.
- Where feasible, private offices may include a window with a view of the staff open office work areas and the public counter.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Supervisory offices should be located close to the staff workstations and offices over which they supervise.

Security

- Duress alarms should be considered for private offices for Clerks of the Court, Deputy Clerks, managers, and supervisors.
- Where office windows provide a line of sight from outside the courthouse, window coverings should be installed to allow light in while preventing visibility into offices from the outside. Additionally, consideration should be given to applying security film (attack-rated) and/or tinting to windows, or, where there is significant risk and feasibility, replacing windows with ballistic-rated glazing. All ground floor windows should, at a minimum, be attack rated.
- Multiple egress routes should be provided to ensure that staff have more than one escape option in the event of an emergency.

Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround spaces throughout.

Technology and Equipment

- Sufficient data and power outlets should be provided for each office workstation.



- All private offices should include a desk suitably sized for one or more computer monitors, flat work surface, a docking station or personal computer, a keyboard/mouse, a desk chair, shelves and/or cabinets, and side chairs.
- Larger offices (160 SF or over) may include a small conference table in addition to the office furniture elements listed above.

Open Office Workstations

Space Standard

- All clerk staff (with the exception of those noted above) should be provided with open workstations.
- A standard workstation will require 36 - 64 SF.
- Workstations requiring space for conducting meetings with another person in the workstation may require 72-80 SF.
- Workstation space requirements exclude circulation around workstations and public areas.

Note: in recent years, space standards for open office workstations have been reduced in many court organizations. In a paper-based work environment, workstation space standards were sized to allow for laying out records and files but have been reduced with the advent of digital work processes. For example, it was common for many new courthouses designed in the past to include 8'x8' workstations. It is now more common for workstations specified as either 6'x6', 6'x8', or 7'x7'.

Functional Expression

WORKSTATION DESIGN

- Workstations should be arranged in an open office setting with access to views, natural light, and shared office amenities.
- The configuration and selection of office workstations will vary depending on the function and type of office furniture used.
- Workstation arrangements can vary significantly in terms of having more of an open-style configuration and having partitions that promote privacy. The selection of workstation furniture should consider these two dynamics:
 1. The need for work privacy and acoustic control.
 2. The need for collaboration and communication among staff.

ACOUSTICS AND PRIVACY

- Acoustics should be designed to reduce sound from ambient office noise and conversations that could distract or reduce the ability to conduct private conversations in the office.
- Carpeting, acoustical ceiling tiles, and wall treatment designed to muffle sound are appropriate for various parts of the clerk's office, particularly in high-traffic and equipment areas. Sound masking or "white noise" devices may be installed in open office areas. These devices produce sound patterns that prevent conversations from being overheard from one workstation to another.
- See [Technical Guidelines for Acoustics in Appendix A](#).

NATURAL LIGHT AND VIEWS

- Open office areas should have ample access to natural light and views to the outside wherever possible.



- Spaces should be well-lit; garish artificial lighting sources should be avoided, and softer/warm-toned fixtures should be preferred.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Open office areas should be adjacent to private supervisor offices and the public transaction counter(s).
- Clerk office staff who also work in courtrooms should have easy access to the courtrooms in which they work. Access should be provided through secure circulation without having to go through public areas. This access will promote the logistical efficiency of operations and facilitate interactions between judges and clerk staff.
- Controlled access should be afforded to the clerk's office area so that visitors can be received in a secure, orderly, and professional manner.
- Staff may work with the public over the counter or in internal administration, involving paper and electronic document processing, accounting, or telephone answering.
- Jobs such as money counting and confidential case processing, should be done out of public view.

Security

- Multiple egress routes should be provided to allow staff with more than one escape option in the event of an emergency situation.
- As noted under the section on Office Support Spaces below, consider designating one or more secure rooms in the clerk's office as a designated 'safe room' where staff may take shelter in the event of an emergency situation. This space should have adequate ventilation, access to a telephone, and may be outfitted with water/food and other supplies that may be needed in an emergency.

Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround spaces.

Technology and Equipment

- Sufficient data and power outlets should be provided for each workstation.
- Work surfaces should be designed to accommodate multiple computer monitors.

Public Counter Workstations

Space Standard

- The size of the counter will vary depending upon the type of transactions occurring and frequency of use.
- Suggested size: 42 - 49 SF for a full-time counter workstation; 25-42 SF for an intermittently used counter workstation.
- A sitting position counter is typically 30" above the floor with a 24-30" wide surface.
- A standing counter is normally 40" high with an 18- 30" wide surface.

Functional Expression

- Every clerk's office should have a public counter where people may transact business.
- The counter should be highly visible and large enough to accommodate anticipated needs.
- Counters may be designed as full-time workstations or for use by staff intermittently when the public is present. The standalone units function best when public contact is sporadic and in small-to-medium size operations when multiple clerks need access to the counter.



- Full-time workstations function best when traffic flow is constant and in larger operations in which clerks are specifically assigned counter duty. The full-time workstation allows the clerk to be seated on one side of the counter, while customers stand on the opposite side.
- The counter stations should be designed so that staff and the customer are at approximately the same eye level. This could be accommodated by sit/stand ergonomic furniture for the counter workstation or a floor level change.
- People on the public side of the counter usually are standing. Deputy clerks on the private side of the counter may either stand or be seated.
- At least one section of the counter should be lowered to serve the needs of mobility-challenged staff and the public.
- Each public counter station should be equipped to handle money transactions.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Public counters should be accessible from the public circulation and should be accessible for staff from the restricted/secured office. The layout of the clerk's office should permit other clerks in the office to observe the counter operations and provide assistance when needed.
- In General District Courts where fines are imposed on a large number of traffic offenders, a secure fine payment area adjacent to the courtroom(s) may be provided to ensure that defendants take care of payment arrangements before leaving the courthouse.

Security

- Design the counter to protect clerks from would-be assailants. The use of polycarbonate (e.g., Plexiglas) may be considered. Acoustic consideration should be given in the design of barriers to allow for clear communication.
- In courthouses where there is no weapons screening, consideration should be given to the provision of ballistic-rated sheeting installed in the walls under and around the counter window and ballistic-rated polycarbonate above the counter.
- When ballistic-rated glazing is installed at public counters, an air gap around the perimeter of the glazing should be provided to allow sound to travel and allow easy communication between clerk staff and the public.
- Provide duress alarms at all counters. Duress alarms should be placed in an easily accessible location for staff. As noted above, duress alarms should also be provided in private offices. This allows supervisory staff to activate the alarm in the event front counter staff are unable to.
- Provide security cameras at all counters. Security cameras should be positioned at the back of the counter to capture a view of the face of visitors transacting business at the counter.

Accessibility

- Accommodation should be made to provide at least one wheelchair-accessible public counter for all clerk public counter locations. As noted above, this section of the counter should be lowered to serve the needs of mobility challenged staff and public. The lowered counters must comply with ADA design requirements. (see Appendix A for more detailed information regarding ADA requirements)
- Provide clear and legible signage. Signage should include consideration for people with limited English proficiency and visual impairments (see Chapter 2 for more detailed information regarding signage)
- Provide instructional material for hearing impaired visitors.

Technology and Equipment

- Provide data and power connectivity at all public counter workstations.



- Consideration may be given to the provision of an electronic display terminal mounted on the counter and viewable by public visitors.

Clerk Reception and Waiting

Space Standard

- The size of the reception/waiting for the public will vary depending upon the volume of foot traffic expected at any given time; assume 10-12 SF per person but no less than 100 SF in total.
- Space for a standing queuing line should be provided in addition to the reception and seated waiting areas. The size of the queuing line for the public will vary depending upon the volume of foot traffic expected at any given time; assume 10-12 SF per person in the queue.

Functional Expression

- The clerk's office should include open space to receive visitors, accommodate queuing lines and provide limited seating on the public side of the counter.
- Depending upon the number of people coming to the counter, the waiting area may be furnished with chairs or benches. It may also include writing tables or wall-mounted counters for the public to complete necessary forms. Computer terminals and video display monitors should be available to provide case status information and instructions regarding the filing of cases.
- Public Access terminals should be provided to accommodate individuals accessing e-filing and remote service. These terminals should be in a location that can be readily monitored by clerks.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Public counters should be located in a prominent location that can be easily accessed by the public. In multi-story buildings, consideration should be given to placing high-volume public areas on the lower floor(s) to reduce demand on elevators and the vertical transportation system.
- As noted above in the public counter workstation adjacency requirements, a secure fine payment area adjacent to the General District Court courtroom(s) is sometimes provided to ensure that defendants take care of payment arrangements before leaving the courthouse.
- There should be a public-waiting area adjacent to the counter where visitors wait to transact business. The minimum distance for the entrance to the counter should be 10 to 12 feet.

Security

- The public counter area may be located outside of the main public corridor, or in smaller courthouses, built into a wall opening onto a public corridor. In the latter case, a secure closure should be installed for after-hours security.
- See also security guidelines in the previous section: "Public Counter Workstations."

Accessibility

- Public counters should be located off the main corridor and accessible to persons with disabilities or part of the public corridors.
- Provide clear and legible signage (see Chapter 2 for more detailed information regarding signage)
- Provide instructional material for hearing impaired visitors.
- See also accessibility guidelines regarding counter heights in the previous section "Public Counter Workstations."



Technology and Equipment

- Consider the provision of automated check-in and queuing systems to reduce the need for standing in line.
- Consider the provision of public access terminals. As the courts continue to move to an electronic work environment, it will be prudent to ensure the availability of electronic access points in close proximity and within sight of clerk offices.

Office Support Spaces and Amenities

Included areas:

- Workroom/Copy Rooms
- Supply Closets/ Supply Rooms
- Conference Rooms
- Focus Rooms and Huddle Rooms
- Staff Breakrooms
- Staff Restrooms
- Staff wellness and quiet rooms (Refer to [Chapter 3, Section 3.5](#) for additional information regarding staff amenities)

Space Standard

- **Workrooms/Copy Rooms:** Size varies based on size of clerk operations and equipment needed (100 – 250 SF typical)
- **Supply closets/Supply rooms:** Size varies based on size of clerk operations (50 – 200 SF typical)
- **Money counting areas and areas with cash safes:** Size varies based on size of clerk operations (100 – 200 SF typical)
- **Conference rooms:** Size varies based on the anticipated number of people attending regular meetings. A minimum of 100 SF, or 25 SF per occupant, is desirable. (e.g., a conference room sized for ten people may be approximately 250 SF)
- **Focus Rooms:** 80 – 100 SF (2-3 person capacity)
- **Huddle Rooms:** 100 – 160 SF (4 – 6 person capacity)
- **Staff Breakrooms:** Size varies based on the number of staff expected to use the breakroom at any given time. A minimum of 120 SF, or 20 SF per occupant, is desirable. (e.g., a breakroom sized for ten people may be approximately 200 SF)
- **Staff Restrooms:** Size varies based on occupancy as determined by applicable building code

Functional Expression

- **Workrooms:** Some tasks require special equipment such as copying/printing, scanning documents, sorting for filing, and processing both incoming and outgoing mail. Large offices may require several large commercial copiers/printers/scanners.
- **Supply closets or supply rooms** should be provided for each clerk's office, or major division within a large clerk's office. The room may include adjustable shelving on three walls. Courts that have not fully transitioned to electronic documents need space to store file folders, court forms, and other paper supplies.
- **Money counting areas and areas with cash safes** should be provided for accounting and money storage functions.
- **Conference rooms:** A conference room, sized to accommodate 6 – 12 people, should be provided for all clerk offices. Clerk offices should also ideally have access to a large conference room to accommodate bigger group meetings and trainings. Depending on the



size and configuration of the courthouse, conference rooms can be shared between multiple departments/agencies. (Refer to [Chapter 3, Section 3.5](#) for more information on shared building amenities.)

- **Focus Rooms and Huddle Rooms** may be provided in open office workstation environments to allow staff to conduct private meetings or collaboration sessions when needed.
- **Breakrooms:** A staff breakroom should be provided for all clerks' offices. Depending on the size and configuration of the courthouse, a shared break room/ lunchroom may be provided for use by multiple departments/agencies. Breakrooms should be equipped with at least one refrigerator, a counter and cabinets, a microwave, a coffee maker, sink, and a table (or tables) for eating. In some situations, a high-top work bar may be located in the break area and can function as a lunch area during the middle of the day, as well as a flexible workspace during other times of the day.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Copier areas, open worktables and related storage space should be located conveniently for staff use and internal copying needs and to fill requests for court documents.

Security

- Some office functions should be done outside of the public view (e.g., counting money and processing confidential cases).
- Money counting areas and areas with cash safes should be equipped with secure access controls and consideration should be given to providing a camera overlooking money safes and cash handling areas.
- Consider designating one or more secure rooms in the clerk's office as a designated 'safe room' where staff may take shelter in the event of an emergency situation. This space should have adequate ventilation, access to a telephone, and may be outfitted with water/food and other supplies that may be needed in an emergency.

Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround spaces throughout.

Technology and Equipment

- Sufficient data and power outlets should be provided in all workrooms and conference rooms.
- Conference rooms, huddle rooms, and focus rooms should be equipped with AV equipment suitable for conducting remote conferences including docking stations and laptop connections, video monitor(s), and speakers.
- Conference rooms, huddle rooms, and focus rooms should be equipped with large wall-mounted video monitor(s) for videoconferencing.
- Conference rooms, huddle rooms, and focus rooms should be equipped with small 'availability panel' monitors mounted on the outside of doors to allow for scheduling of rooms among various users.

Record Storage

Space Standard

- Thoughtful consideration should be given to the amount of paper files which are active and closed files that are required to be retained.
- Space for active files should be determined by the type of storage solution provided (e.g., open shelving vs. high-density storage) and the number of linear inches of files required to be stored based on established retention schedules. The number of filing inches of the active files should be calculated based on the average annual quantity of filed material, active life of cases in each case type, and established retention schedules that determine how long files



should be retained in the active system. The number of filing inches can be applied to the number of square feet required per inch filed for various storage solutions and equipment.

- There should be an established retention schedule for each courthouse based on the relevant laws and the judgement of the respective clerk of court.
- As courts move to paperless operations, consideration should be given to providing space for records that may be transitioned to other uses over time. For example, unfinished ('shelled') future courtroom space courtrooms can be used for records storage until the court experiences growth requiring the use of the shelled courtroom space.

Functional Expression

- The type of filing storage equipment used (e.g., high-density filing systems, open shelves, lateral filing cabinets, etc.) should be based on volume of materials, accessibility requirements, building design and engineering capacity (e.g., weight limits), and cost. Open shelf lateral filing is recommended for active file storage (see earlier discussion of records management).

Adjacency and Circulation

- Active case files should be located within the private areas of the clerk's office where they are readily accessible by clerk staff.
- Over time, as the e-court environment becomes mainstream, the need for paper filing storage will be decreased. Until the need for paper files is reduced, the distribution of file areas should be based on function within the office, accessibility requirements, and security requirements.
- Inactive court records should be stored in storage areas that affords relatively convenient access. Inactive records that may not be destroyed could be transferred to storage outside the clerk's office or courthouse in less expensive but secure and relatively accessible locations.

Security

- Limit access to all clerk files and records to authorized personnel only.
- J&DR court files are required to be stored in a secure locked room accessible only by clerk staff.
- Ballot records maintained by the Circuit Court clerk are required to be stored in a secure locked room accessible only by clerk staff.
- Provide smoke detection devices; consider fire suppression systems that minimize water damage to contents deemed essential to judicial operations.

Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround spaces throughout.

Technology and Equipment

- Consider providing scanning stations to digitize paper records and reduce paper storage needs.

Public Records Review Areas

Public records review areas should be provided in all clerk offices (circuit, general district, and J&DR). As records are continually being imaged and digitized, careful consideration should be given to determining a reasonable space allocation for in-person viewing areas. As court records and land records are being converted to digital formats, the size of the records review rooms should be adjusted accordingly. For example, information storage technologies are rapidly supplanting the need for vast counter areas to review oversized indexes and document books. However, substantial space may still be required for computer terminals, microform readers, and printers to view and print



microfilmed and imaged documents. Total conversion to new technologies will take time, so adequate space for storage of existing paper records and books may still be required.

Space Standard

- The size of the room will vary depending upon the progress of imaging and digitalization, the volume of in-person traffic, and the frequency of use. Assume 25 SF for each occupant using the space at any given time (worktables).

Functional Expression

- Provide open worktables and equipment, including public access terminals and microfiche equipment.
- The room should be well-ventilated and have appropriate lighting levels for reading and reviewing documents.

Adjacency and Circulation

- The records review area should be adjacent to the public counter area and near the file storage area. These areas should also be placed to permit staff monitoring in a controlled area.

Security

- To provide public access to court records and to ensure they are not misplaced, stolen, or altered, the records should be viewed in a controlled area to permit staff monitoring and assistance.
- Entry and exit to some records rooms (including land records rooms) may not always be strictly controlled but these areas should be designed so that monitoring can occur as needed and assistance can be offered when necessary.
- The record room in Circuit Courts in Virginia must meet certain statutory requirements (i.e., [Va. Code §15.2-1638](#)), to include a fireproof record room.
- By statute, the Circuit Court Clerk must store election ballots in a secured room for a specified period of time. Reasonable, secure storage should be planned for based on the expected number of ballots for the jurisdiction.

Accessibility

- Provide clear maneuvering space and ADA accessible work areas.

Technology and Equipment

- Document viewing stations require one large screen video display monitor and computer terminal with keyboard.
- Provide data and power connectivity, to include:
 - One quadraplex power outlet and one dedicated computer power receptacle for each workstation.
 - Two data jacks for each document imaging review workstation.
- Also needed in document viewing areas are:
 - Security cameras.
 - Printers
 - Photocopiers
 - Normal room lighting that avoids glare on monitors.
- Records access computer terminals will become a commonplace feature in the future e-court environment.



- In the land records area of the Circuit Court clerks' offices, information storage technologies are rapidly supplanting the need for vast counter areas to review oversized indexes and document books, but adequate space may still be required for microform readers, computer terminals, and printers to view microfilmed and imaged documents.

Exhibit Storage

Space Standard

- Exhibit rooms typically require a minimum of approximately 100 SF, but the space provided will depend on the volume and type of exhibit materials stored by individual clerk offices.

Functional Expression

- The storage and eventual return or destruction of exhibits is the responsibility of each clerk of court in Virginia. Exhibits are one-of-a-kind irreplaceable items and should never be loosely stored in office areas or records rooms.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Exhibits received by the court as evidence in criminal cases and civil litigation should have their own dedicated, secure storage area.

Security

- The majority of exhibits should be stored in a separate room with highly controlled access. Only exhibits of high value or sensitive nature, such as drugs or weapons, need to be stored in a secure vault.
- Security measures, such as secure doors, no windows, and intrusion alarms, should be provided for exhibit storage areas.

Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround spaces throughout.

3.4 SECURE COURTHOUSE AREAS

Overall Planning and Design Considerations

This section of the Facilities Guidelines covers secure areas within the courthouse specific to the components needed for monitoring security operations, holding and transporting persons in custody, secure parking, secure courthouse entrances, and secure areas for critical infrastructure. The topics covered in this section are not inclusive of all the security functions required in courthouses. For example, weapons screening is covered in [Chapter 3, Section 3.5](#) (Public Areas and Shared Building Amenities). General security provisions, including overall considerations, perimeter security and separation of public, judicial/staff, and in-custody circulation zones, are included in [Chapter 2](#).

Secure areas within the courthouse are typically developed through a combination of architecture, security personnel, operational protocols, and technology/equipment. The planning and design of secure facilities will depend on variables such as the costs of construction and operations, propriety, legality, effectiveness of responses, administrative control, and timeliness.

Quick Links to Topics in this Section

Building Security Command



- Building Security Command Center

In custody Holding and Transport Facilities

- Sally Port
- Central Holding Area
- In-custody Control Room
- In-custody Elevator
- Courtroom Adjacent Holding Area
- In-custody interview Rooms
- Secure Courtroom Area for Potentially Violent Defendant Interpreters / Services for limited English proficiency

Restricted Judicial Parking and Related Building Entrance

- Judicial Parking
- Restricted Building Entrance Related to Judicial Parking Loading/Receiving Dock and Mail Room

Other Restricted Areas

- Server and Data Rooms
- Loading/Receiving Dock and Mail Room

Building Security Command

Building Security Command Center

Space Standard

- A dedicated command center is typically sized between 180 – 250 SF.

Functional Expression

- The command center serves as the central core of court security operations in the courthouse (including the building exterior, all public areas, courtrooms, and courtroom support areas) where all security is monitored and assistance is dispatched.
- The command center should include the necessary and vital technological tools for monitoring courthouse security (e.g., communication systems, cameras, duress alarms, and intrusion alarms). Without a command center, these security measures cannot be utilized or monitored in a successful manner. (See also technology and equipment descriptions below).
- The command center should include one or more workstations to allow for effective monitoring activities. Sufficient wall space should be provided to arrange multiple large screen displays, each with multiple camera views arranged in an organized fashion.
- The building security command center serves a function that is unique from the in-custody control room (see more information on in custody control rooms below). The building security command center may be located as part of the in-custody control room adjacent to the holding area or as a separate facility depending on overall space, staffing, and other considerations.
- In smaller courthouses with limited resources, the command center function may be included as a component of the security booth at the main courthouse entrance. (See Chapter 3, Section 3.4, Weapons Screening for more detailed information.)

Adjacency and Circulation



- The command center may be located near the main entrance of the courthouse so as to provide close support for security screening operations.
- When located near the main entrance, the command center should have a clear, unobstructed view of the main entry doors and the weapons screening station(s).
- As mentioned above, the command center may be located within the central in-custody holding area control room if overall space, staffing, and other considerations favor this approach.
- The command center should provide space for at least two security staff. Staff should have easy access to restroom facilities as they are often needed close at hand to maintain their command responsibilities.

Security

- All power and lighting for the command center should be linked to the courthouse's emergency electrical service. All command center equipment should be on an uninterruptible power supply.
- Access to the command center should be tightly controlled.
- If located adjacent to the courthouse entry and lobby, security-glass windows should be provided to enable command center staff to directly observe the public entry area.

Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround spaces throughout.

Technology and Equipment

- An effective command center should include the following: camera monitors, a duress and intrusion alarm monitoring panel that indicates the location of the activation, and communication and dispatch equipment (radio control/telephone/public address systems/mass notification platforms).
- Other critical systems monitored within the command center may include fire systems and alarms, elevators, emergency power, and generator monitoring equipment.
- All command center equipment should be on an uninterruptible power supply and should be connected to an emergency generator to ensure monitoring and security systems remain operational during a power outage.

ELECTRONIC SECURITY SYSTEMS

The planning and design for courthouses should include provisions for an integrated security technology platform operating independently of other video/audio technologies. Security technology infrastructure should include a comprehensive arrangement of cameras, duress alarms, access control systems, and courthouse lockdown capability. Advanced electronic security systems are increasingly available, and security systems featuring smart control platforms, improved system integration, and AI advancements should be considered where possible. Common electronic security system components include an integrated security technology platform, security cameras, duress alarms, and intrusion alarms. Recommended functional capacity for these components are described below.

- **Security system platform and integration**
 - Integrate the video surveillance system with card access control systems, duress alarm system, detention control system, and vehicle gate control equipment to automatically call up cameras relevant to facility alarms, triggers, and system events requiring immediate assessment and response by security personnel.



- Electronic security system equipment should be network-based, provided with network connectivity, and have an uninterruptible power source.
- A data closet for monitoring equipment on racks is typically provided in or adjacent to the command center.
- **Security cameras** should have sufficient and appropriate functional capacity to meet the security requirements of the courthouse. Functional capacity should include the following:
 - Capacity to capture images in high-resolution and in color. High-resolution, digital color cameras are much better equipped to capture faces and other specific details than low-resolution, black-and-white cameras.
 - Capacity to focus on targeted areas. Two types of cameras that have traditionally been used at courthouses are (a) pan/tilt/zoom cameras, and (b) fixed cameras. More recently, high-definition digital cameras with wide-angle lenses, cameras with multiple lenses, fisheye, panoramic, digital pan/tilt/zoom capability have become popular. Wide-angle cameras, when equipped with sufficient image resolution quality, provide the capability for the user to focus digitally on targeted areas without losing the overall wide-angle coverage provided by the camera, thus avoiding the limitations inherent to traditional pan/tilt/zoom cameras (i.e., pan/tilt/zoom cameras might be panning and zooming at location X while another event may be happening at location Y).
 - Capacity to capture images in low-light settings. Security cameras should have appropriate night settings, such as infrared (IR), to allow for the identification of incidents and individuals in low-lighting conditions.
 - Network streaming capacity. Security camera systems should utilize secure internet protocol (IP) technology to transmit video images and provide system access and control over networks.
 - Recording capacity. The camera system should have networked video recording capacity (either local or cloud-based), enabling CSOs, law enforcement, first responders, and court personnel to view incidents at a later time. This recording function is essential for identifying perpetrators for the purpose of apprehension as well as conviction. Recordings should be retained for at least ten working days.
 - Activation capacity. The operation and recording function of a camera can be set to activate by either motion, sound, or by setting off duress or intrusion alarms.
- **Duress alarms** should be designed to allow judicial officers and staff to silently send a signal to security personnel in the event of a security incident. Functional capacity should include the following:
 - Duress alarms should provide an audible signal to alert staff when the battery needs to be replaced.
 - Duress alarms should be placed in a discreet yet easily accessible location, often just below the desk or counter work area. In open office staff areas, they may be wall-mounted in an easily accessible location.
 - Duress alarms should be integrated with other security systems as discussed above. (E.g., when a duress activates, an image on the appropriate camera should activate on a monitor in the command center.)
 - Newer duress alarms may be battery-operated and controlled over a wireless network, thus reducing the need for cabling. Alarms should be tested at least monthly. (Alarms should provide an audible signal when the battery needs to be replaced.)
 - Judicial officers and staff should be fully trained on the functionality of alarms and the protocols for their use.



- **Intrusion alarm** systems are used to monitor and detect unauthorized access to court facilities. Functional capacity should include the following:
 - Intrusion alarm systems may include a combination of glass-brake sensors, motion sensors, or passive infrared motion detector (PIR) types of alarms.
 - Integrate the intrusion alarms into monitoring panels that clearly identify the area(s) intruded. The panels should be located at the courthouse command center and at the control center of the appropriate responding law enforcement agency.
 - Alarms should be integrated with other security systems as described above (e.g., activation of an alarm produces a video display of its location in the command center).

In custody Holding and Transport Facilities

Sally Port

Space Standard

- The size of the sally port will vary based on the volume of in custody traffic and the anticipated number and type of vehicles used for in custody transport. (e.g., bus, van, cruiser, etc.).
- Sally ports in smaller courthouses should be sized to hold at least one transport van.
- In larger jurisdictions, the sally port is typically sized to hold at least two vehicles.

Functional Expression

- The courthouse should have a secure vehicular sally port for the secure transfer of persons in custody to and from transport vehicles.
- The sally port may be located in an enclosed interior space or on the exterior of the courthouse structure. If located on the exterior, care should be taken to ensure that appropriate fencing or masonry enclosures are provided. Opaque fences and walls are preferred to restrict the visibility of persons in custody. Also, structures should be constructed to provide protection from the weather.
- In larger courthouses, particularly when planning for bus traffic, consideration may be given to the use of a drive-through sally port in order to eliminate the need for a turnaround area.
- From the vehicular sally port, persons in custody will ideally travel through a smaller pedestrian sally port into an initial staging area before being escorted to the holding area.

Adjacency and Circulation

- The sally port could be adjacent to the Sheriff's secure parking area.
- The sally port is ideally located on street level to allow easy ingress and egress from the courthouse.
- Persons in custody should enter the courthouse's central holding area directly from the sally port. When the magistrate's office is located in the courthouse, provide direct access for in-custody persons to be escorted to the magistrate's office directly from the sally port (as feasible).
- Courthouses with a direct connection to a jail may not need a separate sally port if persons in custody coming to court from other facilities are able to be processed through the jail.

Security

- Ideally, the sally port should be located within an enclosed area.
- Access to the sally port should be tightly controlled via a strong overhead vehicular gate.
- The sally port should have security camera coverage.

Accessibility

- Provide ample clearance space for ADA compliance.



- Where there is an elevation change between the sally port and courthouse, ADA compliant ramps must be provided.

Technology and Equipment

- The sally port needs to be well-ventilated and lighted.

Central Holding Area

Space Standard

- Large Group Holding Cell (15–30-person capacity): 200 – 320 SF
- Medium Group Holding Cell (10-person capacity): 160 SF
- Small Holding Cells: 100 SF for up to 4 persons, 70 SF

Functional Expression

- Persons in custody must be separated from the public. As feasible, all courthouses should have a central holding area located on the ground floor or basement. The holding area should be located immediately adjacent to the vehicular sally port.
- In-custody accommodations in courthouses are generally used for short periods of time. Courthouses do not typically house defendants in custody overnight.
- In larger courthouses, holding facilities should be provided in the central holding area in addition to accommodations provided close to the courtrooms. In smaller courthouses, either central holding or courtroom adjacent holding accommodations may be considered.
- In larger courthouses, consider providing a mix of group and single occupancy holding cells.
- Corridors in holding areas are generally wider than typical to allow clear and safe passage of transport personnel and multiple persons in custody. Actual widths will vary depending on the volume of in custody traffic.
- All holding cells should be equipped with detention-grade fixtures including sinks, toilets, and fixed bench seating. The sink and toilet unit may be combined and may have low modesty panels. This eliminates the need for security officers to escort persons in custody to and from toilets. Drains are necessary in any cell with toilets. Drains for sinks and toilets should be large enough so that they cannot be easily blocked. A modesty panel should be provided around the cell toilets to maintain proper privacy.
- Holding areas should be acoustically isolated from adjacent areas. See [Appendix A](#) for additional acoustical information.
- Holding cells should have detention-rated ceilings and walls.

Adjacency and Circulation

- The central holding areas should be easily accessed from the sally port and be located so that quick and efficient delivery of persons in custody to the courtroom(s) may be achieved. In some cases, this is achieved through the provision of a dedicated in custody elevator system.
- Separation should be provided between different in custody populations including males, females, juveniles, and other persons in custody requiring sight and sound separation (e.g., highly volatile individuals) from the general in custody population.
- Toilets and drains should be installed along a wall on the corridor side of the holding facility or along an accessible service duct so that repairs can be made from the outside.

Security

- Access to holding areas should be tightly controlled. Detention-grade access control systems should be provided.



- Care should be taken in the design of all holding cell fixtures and features to prevent wrapping or hanging of clothing or accessories in suicide attempts.
- Lighting fixtures and ventilation registers should be secured in place to prevent their removal and use as weapons. The cells should be equipped with vandal-resistant furniture.

Accessibility

- All holding cell fixtures should be ADA-compliant.

Technology and Equipment

- Holding cells for persons in custody awaiting court appearances should conform to appropriate state and American Correctional Association standards for lighting, ventilation, heating, and cooling in short-term holding and detention facilities.
- Holding cells should be equipped with tamper-resistant security cameras.
- Provide crash-button style duress alarms in corridors outside holding areas and at regular intervals along the route that persons in custody are escorted. These duress alarms may be placed near the floor level for easy activation during a physical altercation.

In-custody Control Room

Space Standard

- In-custody Control Room: 180 – 250 SF

Functional Expression

- The control room within the holding area monitors the operations and all movement of persons in custody and controls access to the holding cells.
- The officer(s) staffing the control room should have a direct view into the holding cells or have visibility through security camera monitors and should be able to see and control all entrances and exits.

Adjacency and Circulation

- The in-custody control room is typically maintained within the central holding area so that visual control is maintained over holding area corridors. The in-custody control room should have visual control over the holding area corridors. One-way windows may be installed within the control to facilitate visual control.
- As described above, the building security command center serves a function that is unique from the in-custody control room. The building security command center may be located as part of the in-custody control room adjacent to the holding area or as a separate facility depending on overall space, staffing, and other considerations.
- Staff should have easy access to toilet and restroom facilities to limit their time away and to maintain their command responsibilities.

Security

- Access to the control room(s) should be tightly guarded and secured from unauthorized entry.
- Security-glass windows should be provided to enable staff to directly observe the central holding area.

Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround spaces throughout.

Technology and Equipment



- The control room(s) should be equipped with surveillance and safety monitoring equipment including electronic door control panels, video monitors, duress alarm systems, intrusion systems, and related equipment necessary to maintain supervision of the holding facility.
- Wall space should be provided for sufficient room to maintain multiple large screen displays. Multiple camera views may be monitored on each screen using duplexing technology.
 - The control room equipment should be network-based, provided with network connectivity, and have an uninterrupted power source.
- A data closet for monitoring equipment on racks is typically provided in or adjacent to the control room.
- All control room equipment should be on an uninterrupted power supply and should be connected to an emergency generator to ensure monitoring and security systems remain operational during a power outage.

In-custody Elevator

Space Standard

- N/A

Functional Expression

- A secure in custody elevator that serves holding cells between pairs of courtrooms is typically the easiest and most efficient method of obtaining direct in-custody access to courtrooms without crossing private judicial/staff corridors and is essential in large multi-storied courtrooms.

Adjacency and Circulation

- In modern courthouses, an in-custody elevator delivery system is provided for each pair of courtrooms.

Security

- In custody elevators must be operated from the In-custody control room or key-controlled and operated with access given only to security officers.

Accessibility

- Elevators should be compliant with ADA standards.

Technology and Equipment

- Holding cells should be equipped with tamper-resistant security cameras.
- In-custody elevators should include video and intercom capabilities.

Courtroom Adjacent Holding Area

Space Standard

- Small Holding Cells: 100 SF for up to 4 persons, 70 SF for individual.

Functional Expression

- In larger courthouses, holding facilities should be provided close to the courtrooms in addition to accommodations provided in the central holding area. In smaller courthouses, either central holding or courtroom adjacent holding accommodations may be considered.
- These court floor holding facilities are best located between pairs of courtrooms and serviced by a dedicated elevator that transports persons in custody to and from the central holding area or persons in custody entrance.



- The court floor holding area should consist of holding cells, an entrance vestibule in front of the elevator, and, if possible, attorney/ persons in custody interview booths. An unenclosed security station may be provided and should be situated in a manner that maintains good visibility over holding areas.
- When an in-custody defendant's case comes before the court, the in custody is escorted from the holding area to the defendant's table. In cases that result in continued detention, the inmate is typically escorted to the holding area to await transport to the detention facility or jail.
- Courtroom adjacent holding cells should be equipped with detention-grade lavatory/toilet facilities.
- Holding areas should be acoustically isolated from adjacent areas (e.g., courtrooms). See Appendix A for additional acoustical information.
- Holding cells should have detention-rated ceilings and walls.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Should the court decide to use the courtroom holding area for adults and juveniles, there must be separate holding cells for men, women, and juveniles with sight and sound separation.
- Courtroom in-custody areas should be accessible via the secure elevators which are typically utilized to transport persons in custody from the central holding area on the lower level. Individual holding cells should access the courtroom via a secure corridor or vestibule; they should not open directly into the courtroom.
- Holding areas should be acoustically isolated from adjacent areas (e.g., to ensure disruptive sounds are not heard in the courtroom). See Appendix A for additional acoustical information.
- The door from the court floor in-custody corridor or vestibule should open directly into the litigation area of the courtroom, ideally in a location proximate to the defense counsel tables.
- Toilets and drains should be installed along a wall on the corridor side of the holding facility or along an accessible service duct so that repairs can be made from the outside.

Security

- Access into the courtroom must be sufficiently removed from public seating to restrict the passing of a weapon or other contraband to an in custody defendant.

Accessibility

- All holding cell fixtures should be ADA compliant.

Technology and Equipment

- It is not unusual for persons in custody to attempt to disrupt court proceedings by shouting insults, using abusive language, banging on walls, or flushing toilets. Such noise from court floor-holding cells disrupts court proceedings, causes embarrassment, and intimidates witnesses or jurors. It is critical that the holding area be soundproofed so that no sound from the holding area is heard in the courtroom.
- Holding cells should be equipped with tamper-resistant security cameras.
- Provide crash-button style duress alarms in corridors outside holding areas and at regular intervals along the route that persons in custody are transported. These duress alarms may be placed near the floor level for easy operation during a physical altercation.
- Holding cells for persons in custody awaiting court appearances should conform to appropriate state and American Correctional Association standards for lighting, ventilation, heating, and cooling in short-term holding and detention facilities.

In-custody interview Rooms



Space Standard

- Attorney Interview Booth: 60-80 SF

Functional Expression

- Attorney-client interview rooms are for attorneys to consult privately with their in-custody clients.
- These rooms should be divided with appropriate security glazing to separate the parties.
- Both entries should be separated from adjacent spaces to promote confidentiality.
- Fixed writing surfaces and/or a pass-through window may be provided.
- Additional lawyer/ persons in-custody interview rooms or cubicles may be located with the central holding areas in larger courthouses to permit attorneys an opportunity to meet with their clients prior to court. These booths should be divided with appropriate security glazing to separate the parties. Attorneys should not have to enter the holding areas to enter the conference booth. The booths should have a paper pass to permit the signing of any documents.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Persons in custody should enter the interview room from the secure side (within the secure perimeter), and attorneys should enter from the public circulation or courtroom.
- Where attorney-client interview rooms or cubicles are located in the central holding area, this may require the public circulation (corridor and/or elevators) to extend to central holding, where attorneys would access attorney-client interview rooms from public circulation. The detention control room should have a direct line of sight to attorney-client interview rooms or cubicles located within the central holding area.

Security

- Non-contact interview booths should be divided by security glazing. The design should facilitate easy sound transmission. For example, a half-inch air gap may be provided around the perimeter of the glazing.
- Vision glass should be provided on the entry to the in-custody side of the interview room to facilitate visual observation by the courtroom holding officer.

Accessibility

- To ensure the ability of persons in custody to consult privately with his or her attorney(s), there should be an ADA accessible non-contact interview booth directly adjacent to the courtroom.
- Attorney interview rooms should be sized for wheelchair movement on both the attorney and in custody sides and have a detention-grade movable plastic chair for the in custody defendant.

Technology and Equipment

- Consideration should be given to acoustical features in these rooms to preserve the confidential nature of the conversations held.

Secure Courtroom Area for Potentially Violent Defendant

Space Standard

- 100 SF for up to 4 people, 70 SF for individual.

Functional Expression

- If feasible, provisions should be made to accommodate a potentially violent defendant. In larger courthouses with multiple courtrooms, at least one courtroom may be equipped with a



separate and secure holding room adjacent to the courtroom to hold potentially violent persons in custody during trials.

Adjacency and Circulation

- The holding room should be located directly adjacent to the courtroom with a security glazed window into the courtroom that allows the defendant to view the proceedings and be viewed by the judge, jurors, and other participants.
- Persons in custody should enter from the secure side (within the secure perimeter),

Security

- Refer to courtroom adjacent holding guidelines.

Accessibility

- Refer to courtroom adjacent holding guidelines.

Technology and Equipment

- The room should be wired for a remotely controlled speaker and microphone so that the defendant can hear as well as see the proceedings and respond to questions as necessary.

Restricted Judicial Parking and Related Building Entrance

Judicial Parking

Space Standard

- The space required for each parking spot will vary based on code requirement factors and the configuration/layout of the parking areas. However, 350 – 400 SF (which includes circulation space for drive aisles) is often considered adequate for pre-design planning purposes.

Functional Expression

- Restricted and secure parking should be provided at least for Judges, the General District Court Clerk, the J&DR Court Clerk, and Constitutional Officers, preferably in an enclosed garage with direct access to the courthouse's restricted circulation system.
- Restricted and secure parking should be provided for Magistrates, when the Magistrates' office is located at the Courthouse.
- Secure judicial parking is best located in the basement of the courthouse, although it is acceptable for parking to be located at grade within a secure parking compound.
- If enclosed parking is not possible, then restricted parking may be provided at grade level within a secured enclosure with secure access. Ideally, the enclosure should be constructed with a solid material such as brick or stone; security slats should be installed if the enclosure is constructed using chain link. There should be a security gate that is continually monitored by security cameras and intercom from the courthouse command center.

Adjacency and Circulation

- The judicial parking area should have direct and secure access to the restricted circulation zone of the courthouse, where judges can have direct access to dedicated elevators and/or stairs leading to the judges' chambers.

Security

- Unauthorized vehicles should not be permitted to access restricted parking areas at any time. The control point for access to below-grade parking should be at, or prior to, the point where a vehicle is at the perimeter line of the courthouse.
- There should be controlled access to and from the secured parking area. Access may be controlled either remotely or by access cards.



- Secured parking spaces should never be identified as being assigned.
- The secured parking area should be monitored by security cameras and intercom from the courthouse command center.
- A sufficient level of lighting should be maintained throughout the secured parking area. (See Appendix A for specific lighting criteria)
- Silent duress alarms and or/emergency call boxes should be installed in secured parking areas.

Accessibility

- Provide accessible parking spaces as required by code.

Restricted Building Entrance Related to Judicial Parking

Space Standard

- NA

Functional Expression

- There should be a separate entrance into the courthouse, which judges, clerks, magistrates, and constitutional officers can access directly and securely from their secure parking area.
- Typically, weapons screening is not required at entrances that are devoted exclusively to judges and constitutional officers.
- If there is a separate (non-public) courthouse entrance directly accessible from a staff parking area, that entrance needs to be staffed by security staff and requires a single metal detector and x-ray machine. It is a best practice to have all employees entering the courthouse screened like everyone else, including the use of a metal detector and x-ray machine. (See [Chapter 3, Section 3.4](#), Security Screening for more information)

Adjacency and Circulation

- The restricted courthouse entrance area should have direct and secure access to the restricted circulation zone of the courthouse where judges can have direct access to dedicated elevators and/or stairs leading to the judges' chambers.

Security

- Security cameras should be provided at all exterior doors, including restricted entrances.
- Provide intrusion detection alarms at all exterior doors, including restricted entrances.

Accessibility

- Provide clear maneuvering space and door access per ADA requirements.

Technology and Equipment

- Provide cameras and intrusion alarms as noted above.

Other Restricted Areas

Server and Data Rooms

Space Standard

- Main Distribution Frame (MDF) room: Size varies by the number of racks and equipment needed.
- Intermediate Distribution Frame (IDF) rooms: 100-120 SF.

Functional Expression



- A Main Distribution Frame (MDF) room is a centralized facility that acts as a network hub for communication lines in a building. The MDF room serves the courts, clerks, and all other building tenants. The room should contain all of the court's and other tenants' communications and data equipment. If the court and other tenants have separate computer networks, the room will need to be partitioned for the different servers.
- Intermediate Distribution Frame (IDF) rooms should be provided on each floor of the courthouse to serve as the main distribution hub for all data and communications for the floor.
- The MDF and all IDF rooms should be in vertical stack alignment to create a dedicated vertical network backbone. Offsetting an IDF on floors is not recommended.

Adjacency and Circulation

- MDF and IDF rooms should be stacked vertically to create an efficient network backbone.

Security

- MDFs and IDFs must be equipped with a secure card reader to limit access to authorized persons. Consideration may be given to installing biometric-based access controls in particularly sensitive areas.

Technology and Equipment

- MDF and IDF rooms should be dust free.
- MDF and IDF rooms should be protected by full-height fire-rated walls (a two-hour rating is common)
- MDF and IDF rooms should have no windows and no false ceilings. Ceilings should be waterproofed.
- MDF and IDF rooms should be positively pressured to prevent dust infiltration. An ambient air temperature of 72 degrees F and 45% relative humidity should be maintained. A backup system to control room temperature and relative humidity is required and must be on the emergency power panel.
- MDF and IDF rooms should be equipped with proper fire suppression systems and smoke detectors.
- Floors must be leveled and be free of excessive vibration. Raised access flooring may be provided.
- All equipment should be protected from power surges with the installation of power conditioning equipment and an uninterruptible power supply (UPS).
- All critical systems should be on an uninterruptible power supply and should be connected to an emergency generator to ensure monitoring and security systems remain operational during a power outage.
- The electrical feed should be isolated, including neutral and ground, from the rest of the building's electrical system.
- Cable runs should not be placed in areas where high electromagnetic field strength exists.
- Building infrastructure should be designed to support multiple communication and data networks (LANs, WANs, and wireless networks) which permit independent and secure data exchange for different functions and user groups. Key considerations should include cabling, space for equipment, power, cooling, security, and flexibility for growth. Network connectivity of the following building system controls should be considered:
 - Generator or standby power systems
 - Un-interruptible power supply
 - Emergency lighting
 - Lighting control systems
 - PBX or telecommunication systems



- Office automation
- Management Information Systems
- Energy Management Systems (EMS)
- Temperature Monitoring Systems (TMS)
- Control systems on packaged equipment, including chillers, boilers, computer room HVAC, kitchen equipment, laboratory equipment, etc.
- Fire Management (Life Safety) Systems, including detection and smoke control devices
- Security Management Systems and Access Control Systems
- Maintenance Management Systems
- Miscellaneous Building Systems
- Elevator Control Systems

Loading/Receiving Dock and Mail Room

Space Standard

- The size of the loading/receiving dock and mail room will vary depending upon the size and volume of service deliveries anticipated.

Functional Expression

- Larger courthouses should have a service entrance for the delivery of supplies and equipment, as well as the collection of trash and recycling.
- The receiving dock security screening area should be located immediately adjacent to the receiving dock bay(s), where all packages and deliveries to the courthouse can be screened or x-rayed.
- Consideration should be given to creating a mail and package receiving room adjacent to the receiving dock where all mail and package deliveries can be received x-rayed as needed.
- Smaller rooms/cages may be constructed within the loading dock and/or mail receiving areas where items can be securely stored.

Adjacency and Circulation

- The loading and receiving areas should be directly connected to the secondary restricted circulation zone described in [Chapter 2](#).

Security

- The receiving dock requires interior and exterior security cameras. The command center should have local and remote control of overhead and access doors. A duress alarm is required in the general receiving area, and there should be an intercom between the receiving dock screening station and the outside receiving area.
- All persons and deliveries entering the courthouse through this location should be screened. In larger courthouses with a high volume of deliveries and service providers, a magnetometer and large item x-ray scanner may be provided.
- Where a package x-ray scanner is not provided, all incoming packages delivered should go through the main lobby security screening.
- Provide security camera coverage over interior and exterior loading and receiving areas.

Accessibility

- Provide clear maneuvering space and door access per ADA requirements.

Technology and Equipment

- Provide cameras and intrusion alarms as noted above.



- Provide cabling and wiring infrastructure for a magnetometer and large x-ray machine where applicable.

3.5 PUBLIC AREAS AND SHARED BUILDING AMENITIES

Overall Planning and Design Considerations

The public circulation system within a courthouse provides unrestricted public access from the main entrance to the various public and functional components of the building. This includes the main lobby, corridors, public elevators and escalators, public washrooms, waiting areas, court clerk counters and reception areas.

The courthouse public spaces should balance the need for security with the need for openness, transparency, and natural light. Public spaces should provide an open and spacious experience for users while also conveying the importance and authority of the courts. Because natural light and views to the outdoors have been shown to reduce stress and regulate mood, biophilic design strategies that focus on connecting building occupants with the natural environment should be considered. Natural light should be provided to all public waiting areas and the main building lobby. Public waiting areas should include ample comfortable seating and should be easily accessible from the main public entrance.

Limiting the number of potential hiding places for weapons and bombs is an important consideration in the design of public areas, including hallways, lobbies, restrooms, and waiting areas. These areas should be supervised and monitored with surveillance equipment. All light switches in public access areas should be key controlled or locked. Access from public spaces to judicial and staff restricted areas should be tightly controlled.

Accessibility is an integral component of courthouse planning and should physically embody the basic principles of fair and equal public access to justice. Because of the unique spaces and functions, court buildings often present unique access challenges for persons with disabilities. See [Chapter 2](#) and [Appendix A](#) for more specific information regarding accessibility.

Planning for Extended Hours Public Access

There is often a need for after-hours access to some parts of the courthouse. The layout of the building should facilitate public and staff after-hours access to these areas while still maintaining overall building security. After hours use by one component must not jeopardize the security of other components in the building. New courthouse facilities should be designed so that security personnel have the ability to segment access into different parts of the building to limit the area(s) the public can access when visiting the courthouse after hours. It is recommended that visitors attending after hours events should be processed through security screening and that security personnel should be present when members of the public are present in the courthouse during afterhours.

Specific components such as Magistrate offices and Juvenile Intake Services require 24/7 access to the public. In locations where those offices are within a courthouse, public access should be provided in two ways:

1. Access from the main courthouse lobby via a public hallway to accommodate visitors during normal court working hours who have already been processed through weapons screening; and



2. Access from separate exterior visitors' entrance with controlled entry on the exterior of the building with appropriate signage to accommodate after-hours visitors. Access via this separate entry should not be allowed during normal business hours.

Space Planning and Design Components

Quick Links to Topics in this Section

- [Public Parking](#)
- [Main Entrance and Weapons Screening Areas](#)
- [Courthouse Lobby and Waiting Areas](#)
- [Information Desks, Directories, Displays, and Kiosks](#)
- [Information Desks, Directories](#)
- [Shared Building Amenities](#)

Public Parking

In addition to judges and staff, attorneys, litigants, family, friends, jurors, media personnel, and witnesses all come to the courthouse daily for trials, other court hearings, and to conduct business with the courts, clerks and other court-related agencies. Adequate parking should be provided for all courthouse building users.

Space Standard

Parking Space: 350 – 400 SF Gross (including drive aisle circulation).

- The space required for each parking spot will vary based on code requirement factors and the configuration and layout of the parking areas. However, 350 – 400 SF is typically considered adequate for pre-design planning purposes.

Functional Expression

- Adequate parking should be available near all court facilities. Requirements for public parking that is adjacent or in close proximity to the courthouse are typically driven by building occupancy and local code. Occupancy is contingent on a number of factors, including:
 - The average number of attorneys, visitors, witnesses, litigants, and jurors expected daily and their expected length of stay.
 - The number of employees (in locations where staff utilize the public parking areas).
 - The availability of and the expected use of public transit.
 - Availability of existing parking within a three- to five-minute walk from the courthouse.
- Dedicated passenger drop-off and pick-up zones should be provided and designed to comply with ADA standards.
- A loading zone should be provided for delivery vehicles that do not need to use the loading dock or where a loading dock is not provided.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Public parking areas should be located in close proximity to the main courthouse entrance.

Security

- No public parking should be located under the courthouse.
- Any public parking facility should have a minimum 100-foot separation from the courthouse. Public parking areas should be well lit, and landscaping should be neatly maintained to eliminate potential hiding spots.



- See also [Chapter 2, Section 2.6](#) for security recommendations related to the overall building perimeter.

Accessibility

- Provide accessible parking spaces in the quantities required by code.
- As noted above, dedicated passenger loading zones should be provided and should comply with ADA standards.

Technology and Equipment

- Consider providing EV charging stations (may be required by local code).

Main Entrance and Weapons Screening Areas

Space Standard

The size and design of the main entrance and weapons screening area should accommodate the anticipated flow of people into the courthouse during the peak hours of operation.

- **Building Entrance Vestibule:** Size varies based on the anticipated volume of traffic.
- **Public Waiting/Queuing at Screening Stations:** 14 SF/person - Size varies based on anticipated volume of traffic.
- **Building Exit Lane:** Size varies based on anticipate volume of traffic.
- **Security Screening Station:** 180 – 220 SF
- **Security Booth:** 100 – 120 SF

Functional Expression

Main Entry and Queuing

- There should be a covered area outside the main entrance to provide protection from the weather for people waiting to enter the courthouse.
- An entrance vestibule may be provided to create a weather barrier between the interior space and the outside elements.
- Provide an area for queuing visitors. The size of the queuing area should be based on the projected volume of people entering the building.
- Provide a dedicated exit lane. (See also related security considerations below.)

Screening Area

- The design of the weapons screening area should convey a positive first impression to court visitors and meld with the design of the main entry and lobby areas.
- Provide a screening station equipped with magnetometer(s) and x-ray machine(s). A screening station may consist of one or more “lanes” with each lane equipped with a magnetometer and an x-ray machine. Depending on the volume of traffic into the courthouse, more than one screening station may be required. Additional stations or lanes as required should be provided for to operate during peak usage (e.g., in the morning and after lunch).
- Design screening lanes to provide ample space for equipment, conveyers and tables. A screening station or lane should include the following:
 - A magnetometer, or metal detector, through which visitors pass for detection of metal objects.
 - An X-ray machine for scanning contents of visitor briefcases, handbags, and personal possessions.
 - A table or counter for secondary inspection of scanned items.



- A magnetic wand inspection area.
- A redressing area to gather belongings after screening.
- Space for at least two security staff per lane in operation.
- In cases where specific proceedings require extra measures of security, public visitors may be screened for weapons again before being admitted into the courtroom. See [Chapter 3, Section 3.2](#), Courtroom Waiting for additional information regarding additional screening in courtroom waiting areas.

Single Main Entrance

- A single main entrance and screening area should be provided for use by both the public and staff. This should be the only point of access into the courthouse other than a secure judicial entrance, the sally port, and the controlled loading dock (larger courthouse).
- It is the best practice that all individuals, including staff and visitors, should be subject to weapons screening upon entering the main entrance of the courthouse.
 - Traditionally, weapons screening is not required at entrances that are devoted exclusively to judges and constitutional officers. There should be a separate entrance into the courthouse which judges and constitutional officers can access directly and securely from their secure parking area. (See [Chapter 3, Section 3.4](#), Restricted Building Entrance Related to Judicial Parking for more information.)
 - If there is a separate (non-public) courthouse entrance for staff in addition to the judicial entrance described above, that entrance needs to be staffed by security staff and requires a single metal detector and x-ray machine.
 - Where a court deems it permissible to allow for an express lane at the main entrance for staff use, consider implementing a system of randomized screening as a less preferable alternative to full screening. This would include an electronic access control gate (or turnstile) next to the screening station that would be activated by employees using an electronic access card/badge.

Security Booth / Security Station

- Consider providing a security booth or security station in the lobby adjacent or nearby the screening station. In smaller courthouses with limited resources, the security booth may serve as the overall building security command center function. (See [Section 3.4](#), Secure Areas for more detailed information about the building security command center.) The security booth may be situated in a raised position and should have good visual control over the screening and building entry/exit.

Adjacency and Circulation

- The main entry should be configured to allow visitors and staff to enter through a dedicated entry queuing lane(s).
- A dedicated exit lane, separate from and adjacent to the dedicated entry queuing lane(s), should allow people to exit from the building without interfering with the security checkpoint or queue. (See also related security considerations below.)
- The screening area should lead directly to the main courthouse lobby. Care should be taken in the planning and design to ensure that visitors can quickly complete the screening process and exit the area in a manner that avoids congestion.
- The queuing area for security should be located so that it does not impede the flow of people (i.e., staff/public entering and staff/public leaving).

Security



- There should be no places outside the building entry and screening area where individuals can store or hide anything prior to being screened.
- Through thoughtful placement and orientation of the screening stations, security personnel can maintain visual control over the entry sequence and ensure that individuals entering the building do not circumvent the screening process. The security screening station should be positioned so that staff operating the equipment have a clear and unobstructed view of people coming in and out of the building.
- Where feasible, the screening areas should be located outside the main mass of the courthouse structure to lessen potential blast effects of an explosive device being detonated at the courthouse entrance.
- Consider placing the security booth in a raised position in the main courthouse lobby to allow visual control over visitor activities in this area.
- Provide a silent duress alarm at the security screening station(s).
- Provide camera coverage over the main entrance and over all screening activities.
- Install ballistic-resistant barriers strategically placed at the screening station and security booth to protect screening staff.
- Establish clear and separate court building exit lane(s). These may be separated from the screening/queuing area with glass partitions to allow for security to observe the area. The exit lane(s) should be equipped with turnstiles for one way traffic. Exit lane turnstiles should be continuously monitored for operational failures and attempts to enter the secure area via the exit lane. Exit lanes should have an 8' tall glass wall for visual surveillance.
- Install reflective glass or film so that the public cannot see into the front entrance screening area but the screening station staff can see outside. Install security film on the inside of the main entry and exit doors to the court building. Such film is not ballistic rated but may prevent the shattering of large pieces of glass in the event of an assault.
 - Note: Ballistic-rated glass at the front entrance may provide protection for persons inside the facilities from would-be assailants outside the front entrance; however, costs for installation and maintenance of ballistic-rated glazing systems may prove prohibitive.
- See [Chapter 2, Section 2.6](#) for security recommendations related to the overall building perimeter.

Accessibility

- The exterior entrance must be barrier-free. Older courthouses with steps at the main entrance may need the installation of ADA ramps.
- Space should be provided for wheelchair-bound visitors are not required to travel a separate path through the screening process and area. Consider providing ADA-compliant magnetometers.

Technology and Equipment

- The weapons screening station requires electrical power for the installation of metal detectors and x-ray machines.
- If deemed appropriate, gun lockers for law enforcement officers entering the facility may be provided, consistent with state and local security procedures.
- If deemed appropriate, cell phone lockers may be installed for use by visitors to safely store their devices while attending court. Signal blocking cell phone pouches/sleeves are also an option for consideration and will require a table for distribution and a storage cabinet.
- The security booth requires data and power connectivity. Special consideration of technology and equipment needs, including camera display monitors, alarm notification, and communications equipment, should be considered for security booths functioning as a building security command center.



- Security personnel should be consulted regarding the provision of secured rifle storage at the security booth for use in responding to active assailant events.

Courthouse Lobby and Waiting Areas

Space Standard

- Space requirements for the courthouse lobby will vary based on the occupancy of the building and the expected number of people who will use them.
- Public circulation corridors should be appropriately sized to allow for adequate waiting areas by providing “wide spots in the road” for benches or other breakout areas for conversation and waiting.
- See [Chapter 3, Section 3.2](#) for specific space standards for Courtroom Waiting and Children/Family Waiting Areas.

Functional Expression

- The main public lobby, where the public enters after being screened, serves as the focal point for the building and provides visual orientation to the other areas through visual cues and signage.
- Oftentimes, due to volume and/or protracted proceedings, lawyers and parties may be required to wait in the main and other lobbies, hallways and alcoves. Consequently, these public spaces should provide comfortable seating, considerate levels of privacy for conversation, safety of the parties, and respect for the adjudication process.
- The public should have easy access to public restrooms, lactation rooms, pay telephones and/or charging stations.

Adjacency and Circulation

- The lobby should be the central axis of the courthouse where major functions and departments may quickly and readily be accessed.
- The public circulation system should link the main public lobby to all public parts of a court building. The overall building organization must be easily understood and be defined by this circulation system. Strategies such as introducing natural light into public corridors and simplifying the overall organization of public corridors can improve public wayfinding and access to services within the building. See [Chapter 2](#) for more information regarding the public circulation zone.

Security

- Public lobbies should be arranged so that clear sightlines are maintained to limit potential hiding places. The use of large open spaces to increase visibility should be encouraged.
- Sufficient public waiting space should be provided to separate opposing parties, particularly in domestic cases.

Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround space throughout.

Technology and Equipment

- The following may be provided in the main lobby of the building and in public lobbies on each floor of the courthouse.
 - Electronic building directories.
 - Digital court calendar monitors
 - Public access kiosks.
- Each courthouse should be equipped with a public address system reaching all public areas of the courthouse. Especially in large courthouses, it is possible that a paging system may be



needed to locate parties. When court schedules fall behind or move ahead more rapidly than anticipated, the court may benefit from a means of paging parties throughout the courthouse. Such systems should not operate in courtrooms or office areas.

Information Desks, Directories, Displays, and Kiosks

Space Standard

- Information Desk: 80 - 120 SF

Functional Expression

- **Building Directories:** There should be a building directory and a building schematic diagram located at the main public entrance that lists all the offices in the building. These can also be placed in a prominent location on each floor of the courthouse. Interactive touchscreen displays providing directional as well as other building or case information should be located in the lobby and other strategic locations elsewhere in the building.
- **Digital Court Calendar Monitors:** Large, easily readable digital court calendar monitors are an effective information source for visitors, especially in larger courthouses and are generally provided in new court facilities. These screens should not display juvenile names.
- **Information Desks:** In large, busy courthouses, a staffed information desk may be considered.
- **Court Access Kiosks/Workstations:** Courts in Virginia will increasingly continue to provide the public with online, digital access to court services through e-information, e-forms, and e-filing. The public, and pro-se litigants in particular, will access court databases, file documents, research case information, and court schedules, and make court fines and fee payments online. Access to these services should be provided by way of public kiosks/workstations.
- The information area and displays can be used in conjunction with directional signage to provide information to courthouse visitors about the location of services.
- A clear and effective signage system can help visitors navigate the courthouse and promotes goodwill with the public. It also reduces the need for visitors to ask for directions or instructions from court staff and or security personnel. There are many signage styles available, and several should be considered prior to selection. See [Chapter 2](#) for more specific information regarding signage and wayfinding.

Adjacency and Circulation

- If an information desk is included, it should be located in a highly visible area near the main entrance just inside the security perimeter and clearly identified.
- Building directories and information monitors should be located in the main lobby and in a prominent location on each floor of the courthouse.
- Digital court calendar monitors should be located in the main lobby of the building and in public lobbies on each floor of the courthouse.
- Court access kiosks and workstations may be provided as part of or nearby clerk offices in a highly visible, open and accessible area.

Security

- The placement and design of building directories, information monitors, and kiosks should be carefully considered so as not to impede the security screening process or block public circulation paths.
- Building maps/egress diagrams should not include detailed floor plan information of secure or sensitive areas in the courthouse.

Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround space throughout.



Technology and Equipment

Provide data and power connectivity for the following if included in the courthouse:

- Electronic building directories.
- Digital court calendar monitors
- Public access kiosks and workstations.

Shared Building Amenities

Included areas:

- Conferencing and Event Space
- Shared Building Work Area/Public Meeting Cafe
- Building Café/ Food Service
- Staff Wellness Facilities

Space Standard

- Space requirements for building amenities will vary based on the occupancy of the building and the expected number of people who will use them.

Functional Expression

CONFERENCE AND EVENT SPACE

Court and court-related agencies may, on occasion, require access to flexible spaces that can accommodate training, conferences, committee meetings, receptions, and ceremonies. Installation of a movable partition for flexibility in accommodating both large and medium-sized events may be considered. The provision of such a space does not replace the need for regular use of small meeting rooms within respective departments. Considerations include the following:

- The space should be flexibly arranged so that different types of trainings and meetings can be accommodated.
- Consider access-controlled entry for staff and a separate public entry.
- The space may be subdividable using movable partitions.
- Consider providing furniture storage to support multiple event types and needs.
- A galley/serving bar could be included or provided in adjacent area.

SHARED BUILDING WORK AREA/PUBLIC MEETING CAFE

Consideration should be given to providing a space in the courthouse where attorneys, service providers, and the public can convene informal meetings, prepare for hearings, and conduct work while waiting before or in between courtroom proceedings. A shared building work area/public meeting café may include furnishings such as small tables and comfortable seating areas and may be combined with other building amenities such as a building café (see below).

BUILDING CAFÉ/FOOD SERVICE

Consideration should be given to providing some type of food service in the courthouse, particularly where food service is not available near the courthouse. As mentioned above, such a space could also be used as an informal meeting/work space for attorneys, service providers, and the public while waiting before or in between courtroom proceedings.



- Depending on the court's size and level of activity, this need may be addressed by vending machines, a snack bar, or a cafeteria. For courts situated in a government complex, a central cafeteria may be available which would serve the courts' needs.
- In larger courthouses, a limited café/ food service outlet may be included in the building.
- The space could include café tables and chairs, a food pickup & cashiering area, a food prep area, and a storage area.
- In addition to providing food and beverages, the café may be used as an informal meeting place for all building users. (See the description above for the shared building work area / public meeting café.)

STAFF WELLNESS FACILITIES

- Courthouses may include shared and wellness facilities. Such facilities may include amenities such as exercise rooms, shower and changing facilities, and bicycle storage facilities.
- Staff "quiet rooms" may be provided as part of the wellness offerings. Quiet rooms provide a respite and promote calmness and tranquility. Quiet rooms should include soft furnishings such as chairs and sofas, and users should have the ability to control lighting in the room.
- Elements such as exposure to natural light, views of nature, and access to outdoor gardens should be considered when planning wellness spaces.

Adjacency and Circulation

CONFERENCING AND EVENT SPACE:

- As a shared amenity, these multi-purpose spaces should be in a location where they can be easily accessed by all staff working at the courthouse and by the general public. Depending on the building configuration, separate access points to conferencing facilities may be provided from the restricted staff circulation zone and from the public circulation zone.

SHARED BUILDING WORK AREA/PUBLIC MEETING CAFE

- As a shared amenity, this multi-purpose space should be in a location where it can be easily accessed by all building users.
- This area may be combined with other building amenities such as a building café.

BUILDING CAFÉ/ FOOD SERVICE

- As a shared amenity, this multi-purpose space should be in a location where it can be easily accessed by all staff working at the courthouse and the general public.
- This area may be combined with other building amenities such as a shared building work area / public meeting café.

STAFF WELLNESS FACILITIES

- These facilities should be in a location easily accessed by all staff working at the courthouse. If possible, wellness spaces should have access to natural light and views. Where feasible, enclosed outdoor areas or gardens may be included as part of the space.

Security

- Restrict public access to all building amenities intended for staff use only.

Accessibility

- All building amenities must comply with ADA design requirements.

3.6 MAGISTRATE AREAS



In many instances, a citizens' first contact with Virginia's judicial system is with a magistrate. A magistrate is a judicial officer in the Commonwealth of Virginia. A principal function of a magistrate is to provide an independent, unbiased review of complaints of criminal conduct brought by law enforcement or the public. Magistrate duties include administering oaths, issuing various types of processes such as arrest warrants, subpoenas, summonses, search warrants, emergency protective orders, emergency custody orders, mental health and medical temporary detention orders, and accepting prepayments for traffic infractions. Magistrates also conduct bail hearings in instances in which an individual is arrested to determine under what conditions the person should be released from custody prior to trial, taking into account such factors as the evidence brought before them, the seriousness of the accusation, and the potential danger to society or to the accused. These judicial hearings may be conducted with the arrestee on site or by video conference with the arrestee located at a remote site such as a jail or police station. Magistrates provide service 24/7/365, conducting hearings in person or using videoconferencing systems.

Overall Planning and Design Considerations

As this Section 3.5 makes clear, there are many important factors to consider when planning for a magistrate office suite. While as also indicated below, it is the responsibility of the county or city to provide facilities for magistrates, it is imperative that magistrates have an opportunity to express their facility needs. Accordingly, the Magistrate Regional Supervisor and Chief Magistrate for the district, or their designee, should be the magistrate representatives on a planning committee on a planning committee that is considering a new or remodeled facility that will include magistrate offices.

Per the Code of Virginia, "The counties and cities served by a magistrate shall provide suitable quarters for such magistrates, including a site for any videoconferencing and other equipment necessary to provide secure, remote access and the transmission of paperwork to such magistrates by the public and law-enforcement officers. Such quarters shall be located in a facility open to the public and appropriate to conduct the affairs of a judicial officer as well as provide convenient, 24-hour access to the public and law-enforcement officers. Where practicable, such quarters shall be in a courthouse or a law-enforcement office where business is regularly conducted and shall include an entrance, exit, and parking for magistrates that is separate from those for members of the public. Such quarters shall provide for the physical security of the magistrate and shall include controlled access to interior spaces or intrusion detection, a secure physical barrier between the magistrate and members of the public, and a readily accessible duress button that connects the magistrate to local law enforcement. The county or city shall also provide all furniture and other equipment necessary for the efficient operation of the office." [Va. Code § 19.2-48](#). If the location is not in a courthouse complex, the image of the building and the magistrate office suite should be one that:

- Engenders public trust and confidence through an image of transparency, openness, fairness, and dignity.
- Reinforces the independence of the judiciary with a design that is distinctive and emblematic of the Virginia court system.
- Reflects the importance, authority, and stability of the justice system.
- Conveys a sense of judicial decorum and efficiency.

Some Magistrate offices in Virginia are located in a law enforcement facility – most often in a county sheriff facility or a local police department. One advantage of the magistrate's office being located in a law enforcement facility is the proximity of law enforcement officers available on a 24/7 basis to respond to a magistrate in need in the event of a security incident. This is in addition to the cost and convenience factor of law enforcement officers escorting in-custody persons to proceedings before a magistrate. The



primary disadvantage of this location is that it may foster a perception on the part of the public that the magistrate is a component part of law enforcement, thus undermining the public's confidence regarding the judicial independence of the magistrate position. This is an extremely important consideration, and for this reason, it is most desirable for the magistrate's office to be located in a courthouse.

These advantages and disadvantages of where to locate magistrate facilities should be carefully considered when planning magistrate facilities. These considerations, among many others, underscore the importance of having magistrate representation on courthouse facility planning committees to ensure the most appropriate location is planned in order to effect the efficient administration of justice.

Space Planning and Design Components

The magistrate's basic office suite should consist of the following separate component rooms or areas:

1. A private and secure office to allow each magistrate on duty to sit while conducting proceedings. It is also the location where magistrates conduct remote proceedings and conduct other administrative duties as required by their position.
2. A dedicated room or area where a member of the public sits in a secure, private setting during a hearing or proceeding with the magistrate.
3. A room or area for a law-enforcement officer and person in-custody to sit during a hearing or proceeding with the magistrate. Note that in some cases this room may not be within the magistrate office suite if the hearing or proceeding involving a person in-custody will be done via video conferencing. Also, as an alternative, a shared room or area could be utilized for both citizen and in-custody hearings and proceedings, provided that access to the room or area is controlled by the magistrate in order to prevent a citizen and an in-custody person being present in the room or area at the same time.
4. A public waiting area where members of the public wait to be called for a hearing or proceeding with the magistrate.

NOTE: An additional administrative office or area may also be needed in a "hub" location for a chief or regional supervising magistrate. These hubs are typically busier locations that are open 24 hours a day/7 days per week.

Quick Links to Topics in this Section

- [Building Exterior](#)
- [Magistrate's Private Office](#)

Citizen Hearing/Proceeding RoomPublic Waiting Area

Space Standard

- The size of the public waiting area will vary depending upon the volume of foot traffic expected at any given time; assume 10-12 SF per person but no less than 100 SF.

Functional Expression

- The public waiting area is where non in-custody parties wait to be called for a hearing with a magistrate.
- Each office should suite have a public waiting area, directly accessible from a public hallway, with appropriate signage from the public hallway welcoming the public into the waiting area.
- Typically, there will be no transaction/proceeding window in the public waiting area, and there will be no staff present. In some cases, there may be a staff member present to "triage" what



is coming in. There may also be in some instances a transaction window to enable staff to provide needed documents to the public or to pass documents to court staff or law enforcement officers.

- The size of the waiting area will depend on the level of magistrate traffic in each location. There should be an appropriate number of seats in the waiting area.
- There should be appropriate signage within the waiting area advising the public that they will be notified via an intercom when it is their turn to meet with the magistrate if they have an appointment. There should also be signage advising the public what they need to do if they do not have an appointment.

Adjacency and Circulation

- When located in a courthouse, the public waiting area should have access from two points including: 1) access from the main courthouse lobby via a public hallway to accommodate visitors during normal court working hours; and 2) a separate visitors entrance on the exterior of the building with appropriate signage for access after normal court working hours.
- When located in a police department or sheriff facilities, the main visitor entrance should be separate from the visitor entrance used by the public when visiting the police or sheriff.
- There should be a locked door leading directly from the waiting area into the non in-custody hearing room. The magistrate will remotely unlock the door and notify each member of the public via an intercom when it is time to enter the hearing room.

Security

- A security camera should also be installed to cover the waiting area. The camera should be viewable at the magistrate's private office and the main security office.

Accessibility

- Citizens should have 24/7 access to the magistrate
- There should be signs and instructional material for the hearing impaired.

Technology and Equipment

- The exterior visitor entrance to the waiting room should be equipped with a video intercom system and a remotely operated door locking mechanism.

Administrative Office for Regional Supervisors and Chief Magistrates

Space Standard

- Office: 120 SF
- Workstation: 42-64 SF (for each workstation when a larger office is shared)

Functional Expression

- An additional administrative area may also be needed in a "hub" location for a Chief or Regional Supervising magistrate. These hubs are typically busier locations that are open 24 hours a day/ 7 days per week.
- Regional Supervisors and Chief Magistrates have the same powers as other magistrates but also have supervisory and administrative duties and responsibilities. These officials typically need an administrative office for conducting private discussions with magistrates, governmental officials, and members of the public, and for maintaining confidentiality.
- This administrative office is in addition to the private office for proceedings referenced above.

Adjacency and Circulation



- Only the Regional Supervisory or the Chief Magistrate should have access to these administrative offices, which should be physically separate from and not accessible from the rest of the magistrate office suite.

Security

- Only the Regional Supervisory or the Chief Magistrate should have access to these administrative offices, which should be physically separate from and not accessible from the rest of the magistrate office suite.

Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround spaces throughout.

Technology and Equipment

- Sufficient data and power outlets should be provided for.
- Capability for conducting video conferences. The video conferring may include a large wall-mounted video monitor for conducting remote proceedings
- The administrative office should be furnished with a computer, a desk and chair, side chairs for guests, filing cabinets for personnel and administrative records, bookshelves, and a credenza.
- Law Enforcement and In-Custody Person Hearing Room
- Public Waiting Area
- Administrative Office for Regional Supervisors and Chief Magistrates

Building Exterior

Functional Expression

- There should be separate reserved parking spaces provided for magistrates. If at all feasible, the spaces should be in a secure area. At a minimum, the spaces should be reserved, but the spaces should not be marked in a way that identifies them as reserved for a magistrate. Also, the spaces should be located near the entrance to the building used by the magistrates.
- When the magistrate's office suite is located in a law enforcement building, there should also be ample signage, in multiple languages as appropriate, that makes it abundantly clear to members of the public that the magistrate is a judicial officer fully independent and not in any way affiliated with law enforcement.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Magistrates should be able to enter and exit their private office inconspicuously via a dedicated restricted entrance.
- Restricted circulation should be provided from a dedicated building entrance via a private corridor directly into the magistrate's private office in the magistrate's office suite.

Security

- Provide secure parking where feasible. In larger courthouses this may include enclosed parking in a secure garage or more commonly, a secure outdoor parking lot enclosed by a wall or opaque security and vehicle access gates.
- Provide security cameras to cover the path that the magistrate takes from leaving his/her car until arriving at his/her private office.
- Provide sufficient lighting to cover the parking area and path magistrate takes until entering the building. (Refer to lighting guidelines in [Appendix A](#) for detailed recommendations regarding exterior lighting).



Accessibility

- An accessible public entrance is required
- Where feasible, provide a visitor drop-off area at the main public entry.

Magistrate's Private Office

Space Standard

- Office: 120 SF
- Workstation: 42-64 SF (for each workstation when a larger office is shared)
- Rest room: 56 SF
- Break room or kitchenette: 50 – 120 SF
- Supply closet: 10 – 25 SF
- Data/I.T. closet: 50 SF (100-120 SF for IDF Rooms)

Functional Expression

- The magistrate private office is where the magistrate(s) sit while conducting proceedings. It is also the location where magistrates conduct remote proceedings and perform other administrative duties as required by their position.
- The magistrate's private office should be secured and include the following elements/features:
 - Self-controlled door access. Magistrates should not be dependent on anyone else to get in or out of their private office.
 - A transaction/proceeding window
 - With a ½ inch airspace that obviates the need for a speaker space at the sides of the window; and
 - A pass-through space for documents at the bottom of the window.
- Magistrate offices typically operate on a 24/7 basis and are frequently located in facilities other than courthouses. Magistrates need to have self-controlled access to necessary facilities within their secure private office space. The following additional spaces should be provided, directly accessible from the magistrate's private office:
 - A private bathroom
 - Small kitchenette or break area (Including a microwave oven, sink and refrigerator)
 - Storage room for supplies
 - Individual data room/closet or cabinet

Adjacency and Circulation

- The magistrate's private offices should be directly accessible from the corridor that the magistrate uses after entering the building. The private office area should not be accessible by anyone other than the magistrate.

Security

- A dependable capability (e.g., an alarm button or some other technology) that will have the capacity to summon a quick security officer response in the event of a security incident or emergency. "A readily accessible duress button that connects the magistrate to local law enforcement" is statutorily required. [Va. Code §19.2-48.1](#).
- Security camera monitor(s) displaying images of all approaches to the magistrate office suite as well as images of all component areas within the magistrate office suite. These images should be monitored by the magistrate and by security officers on a 24/7 basis as well.
- Securely locked doors, with a second means of egress from the magistrate's private office in the event of an emergency or security event.



- Ballistic-rated glass for the transaction/proceeding window
- Ballistic-rated assembly of walls surrounding the transaction/proceeding window

Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround spaces throughout.

Technology and Equipment

- Self-controlled HVAC
- Direct telephone line / fax line
- Sufficient data and power outlets should be provided.
- Equipment for conducting video conferences. The video equipment may include a large wall-mounted video monitor for conducting remote proceedings
- All magistrate offices should include a desk suitably sized for multiple computer monitors, flat work surface, a docking station or personal computer with multiple video display monitors, keyboard/mouse, a desk chair, shelves and/or cabinets and side chairs.
- Other office equipment may include a file cabinet, bookshelves, printers, photocopier, document scanner, fax machine, and document shredder.
- A small safe is useful for the purpose of securing cash that is transacted by way of cash bonds and prepayments, etc.

Citizen Hearing/Proceeding Room

Space Standard

- 80-100 SF (.). Typically sized to accommodate 2/3 people.

Functional Expression

- Provide a dedicated room where a citizen can speak with the magistrate in a secure, private setting – not simply in a portion of a larger open public area where others may overhear sensitive matters.
- The citizen hearing rooms are intended for use by the general public and are generally not used for in-custody persons (see Law-Enforcement and In-Custody Hearing Rooms)

Adjacency and Circulation

- The citizen hearing/proceeding room should be directly accessible from the waiting area.

Security

- The magistrate should remotely control access to the citizen hearing/proceeding room.
- Provide a security camera positioned to include the faces of all persons appearing in front of the magistrate in the field of view. These images should be monitored by the magistrate and by security officers on a 24/7 basis as well.

Accessibility

- The citizen hearing rooms should be located off the public waiting room and accessible to persons with disabilities.
- The counter and windows must comply with ADA design requirements. For example, standing height counters are not ADA compliant.
- There should be signs and instructional material for the hearing impaired.

Technology and Equipment

- There should be audio/telephone equipment so that the magistrate can buzz the members of the public into the hearing room from the waiting room.



Law Enforcement and In-Custody Person Hearing Room

Space Standard

- Varies by number of officers and in-custody people typically occupying the space. 100 SF is a common size for a hearing room officer with one in-custody person.

Functional Expression

- The law enforcement and in-custody hearing or proceeding room is where the law-enforcement officer and the person in-custody sits during the hearing or proceeding. There needs to be sufficient space for at least two people.
- This should be a place where the person in custody can speak with the magistrate in a secure, private setting – not simply in a portion of a larger jail environment. The person in-custody and the law enforcement officer need to be able to simultaneously see and speak to such magistrate or authority pursuant to [Va. Code §19.2-82](#).
- The room or area where a hearing is conducted with a person in-custody of law enforcement should provide for security measures to provide for the safety of the person in-custody and law enforcement. For example, a seat with mechanisms to be able to handcuff a person to the seat while waiting to speak with the magistrate.
- As previously noted, in some cases this room may not be needed because the hearing or proceeding involving a person in-custody will be done via video. Video conferencing should in any event be always encouraged, and acoustical features should be kept in mind.
- Also as previously noted, as an alternative, a shared room or area could be utilized for both citizen and in-custody hearings and proceedings, provided that there is controlled access to the room or area in order to prevent a citizen and an in-custody person being present in the room or area at the same time.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Should be adjacent to and accessible to an in-custody holding area.
- Should be accessed via a secure in-custody circulation system (no public or staff access).

Security

- A security camera should also be installed to cover the entrance to this area. The camera should be monitored at the magistrate's private office and also at the main security office.

Public Waiting Area

Space Standard

- The size of the public waiting area will vary depending upon the volume of foot traffic expected at any given time; assume 10-12 SF per person but no less than 100 SF.

Functional Expression

- The public waiting area is where non in-custody parties wait to be called for a hearing with a magistrate.
- Each office should suite have a public waiting area, directly accessible from a public hallway, with appropriate signage from the public hallway welcoming the public into the waiting area.
- Typically, there will be no transaction/proceeding window in the public waiting area, and there will be no staff present. In some cases, there may be a staff member present to "triage" what is coming in. There may also be in some instances a transaction window to enable staff to provide needed documents to the public or to pass documents to court staff or law enforcement officers.
- The size of the waiting area will depend on the level of magistrate traffic in each location. There should be an appropriate number of seats in the waiting area.



- There should be appropriate signage within the waiting area advising the public that they will be notified via an intercom when it is their turn to meet with the magistrate if they have an appointment. There should also be signage advising the public what they need to do if they do not have an appointment.

Adjacency and Circulation

- When located in a courthouse, the public waiting area should have access from two points including: 1) access from the main courthouse lobby via a public hallway to accommodate visitors during normal court working hours; and 2) a separate visitors entrance on the exterior of the building with appropriate signage for access after normal court working hours.
- When located in a police department or sheriff facilities, the main visitor entrance should be separate from the visitor entrance used by the public when visiting the police or sheriff.
- There should be a locked door leading directly from the waiting area into the non in-custody hearing room. The magistrate will remotely unlock the door and notify each member of the public via an intercom when it is time to enter the hearing room.

Security

- A security camera should also be installed to cover the waiting area. The camera should be viewable at the magistrate's private office and the main security office.

Accessibility

- Citizens should have 24/7 access to the magistrate
- There should be signs and instructional material for the hearing impaired.

Technology and Equipment

- The exterior visitor entrance to the waiting room should be equipped with a video intercom system and a remotely operated door locking mechanism.

Administrative Office for Regional Supervisors and Chief Magistrates

Space Standard

- Office: 120 SF
- Workstation: 42-64 SF (for each workstation when a larger office is shared)

Functional Expression

- An additional administrative area may also be needed in a "hub" location for a Chief or Regional Supervising magistrate. These hubs are typically busier locations that are open 24 hours a day/ 7 days per week.
- Regional Supervisors and Chief Magistrates have the same powers as other magistrates but also have supervisory and administrative duties and responsibilities. These officials typically need an administrative office for conducting private discussions with magistrates, governmental officials, and members of the public, and for maintaining confidentiality.
- This administrative office is in addition to the private office for proceedings referenced above.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Only the Regional Supervisory or the Chief Magistrate should have access to these administrative offices, which should be physically separate from and not accessible from the rest of the magistrate office suite.

Security

- Only the Regional Supervisory or the Chief Magistrate should have access to these administrative offices, which should be physically separate from and not accessible from the rest of the magistrate office suite.



Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround spaces throughout.

Technology and Equipment

- Sufficient data and power outlets should be provided for.
- Capability for conducting video conferences. The video conferring may include a large wall-mounted video monitor for conducting remote proceedings
- The administrative office should be furnished with a computer, a desk and chair, side chairs for guests, filing cabinets for personnel and administrative records, bookshelves, and a credenza.

3.7 COURT AND COURT-RELATED AGENCIES AND SERVICES

Overall Planning and Design Considerations

Courthouses in Virginia generally include space for the various components previously described in this chapter (i.e., courtrooms and chambers, clerk areas, secure courthouse areas, public areas and shared building amenities, and magistrate areas depending on the locality). Many courthouses also require space for court programs such as interpreter services and mediation. Other court-related organizations may be considered for location within the courthouse contingent upon the availability of space.

In some cases, court-related organizations do not require permanent dedicated space. In these situations, consideration may be given to the provision of spaces that allow employees to work away from their regularly assigned office. Examples include field offices and shared/multi-use meeting facilities with remote access capabilities.

After Hours Access

There is often a need for after-hours access to some parts of the building for court and court-related agencies and services. The Commonwealth's Attorney's Office, for example, often needs to work after-hours and on weekends. If Juvenile Court Services and Community Corrections are in the courthouse, they too may desire after-hours access to meet with clients and provide special programs. Magistrates, if in the courthouse, require 24-hour access seven days a week.

Quick Links to Topics in this Section

Court-Related Agencies with Defined Permanent Space Needs

- [Commonwealth's Attorney Offices](#)
- [Commonwealth Attorney Victim/ Witness Program](#)
- [Court Service Units \(Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice\)](#)

Court Programs & Related Agencies with Undefined Space Needs

- [Interpreters / Services for limited English proficiency](#)
- [Alternative Dispute Resolution](#)
- [Adult Probation \(Virginia Department of Corrections\)](#)
- [Court Appointed Special Advocates - CASA](#)
- [Division of Child Support Enforcement \(DCSE\)](#)



- [Guardian Ad Litem](#)
- [Law Library](#)
- [Public Defender](#)

Accommodations for Specific Court User Groups

- [Pro se litigants – Court Resource Center](#)
- [Press and News Media Accommodations](#)
- [Police Waiting/Workroom](#)
- [Attorney Workroom](#)

Court-Related Agencies With Defined Permanent Space Needs

The space needs of the Office of the Commonwealth Attorney, the Commonwealth Attorney Victim/Witness Program, and the Department of Juvenile Justice Court Services Units are often accommodated within the confines of a courthouse. Accordingly, the following guidelines for these facilities are set forth.

Commonwealth's Attorney Offices

The Commonwealth's Attorney prosecutes criminal cases in all three court types in Virginia. In addition to the general office activities, prosecutors need to be able to interview victims and witnesses (see Victims/Witness component descriptions below), interview police officers, conduct legal research, maintain case files, store evidence, conduct investigations, and prepare written reports and documents. These activities require spaces such as waiting areas, interview rooms, records and evidence storage areas, clerical offices, attorney offices, conference rooms, trial preparation space, work rooms, supply storage, and break rooms.

While it is not essential for the prosecutor to be located in the courthouse, it is fairly common in Virginia. If located outside the courthouse, it is important that the Commonwealth's Attorney have offices near the courthouse, because of the necessity for the prosecutor to be present in court for long periods of time and to have access to court records and personnel.

Space Standard

- **Commonwealth's Attorney private office:** 300- 380 SF
 - As a constitutionally elected official, the Commonwealth Attorney may be afforded a slightly larger office similar to that of a Circuit Court judge.
- **Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Office:** 120-140 square feet
- **Open Office Workstation:** 36 – 64 SF
- **Reception/ Waiting:** The size of the reception/waiting for the public will vary depending upon the volume of foot traffic expected at any given time; assume 10-12 SF per person but no less than 100 SF in total.
- **Public Counter:** The size of the counter will vary depending upon the type of transactions occurring and frequency of use. Suggested size: 42 -49 SF for a full-time counter workstation; 25-42 SF for an intermittently used counter workstation.
- **Evidence Storage:** Size will vary by locality, depending on volume.
- **Interview Rooms:** 80 – 120 SF, depending on the number of individuals.
- **Workrooms/Copy Rooms:** Size varies based on the size of operations and equipment needed (100 – 250 SF typical).



- **Supply closets/Supply rooms:** Size varies based on the size of operations (50 – 200 SF typical).
- **Conference rooms/ Trial preparation Rooms:** Size varies based on the anticipated number of people attending regular meetings. A minimum of 100 SF, or 25 SF per occupant, is desirable. (e.g., a conference room sized for ten people may be approximately 250 SF).
- **Staff Breakrooms:** Size varies based on the number of staff expected to use the breakroom at any given time. A minimum of 120 SF, or 20 SF per occupant, is desirable (e.g., a breakroom sized for ten people may be approximately 200 SF).

Functional Expression

- Offices must accommodate prosecuting attorneys and staff, visiting private attorneys, witnesses and victims (see below), law enforcement officers, and the general public.
- The Commonwealth Attorney's private office should accommodate a desk and workspace, bookshelves, an informal conference area for at least four individuals, coat storage and a restroom.
- Attorneys should have private offices that accommodate two to three visitors.
- Law clerks or interns may utilize open office workstations or semi-private offices.
- The office environment should project an image compatible with that of a private law firm.
- Secure storage for evidence should be provided.
- There should be a reception area with chairs for people to wait. There should be a secure reception window where visitors may be received. Entry to the Office should be by means of a secure entrance controlled by the receptionist.
- Conferencing space should be provided.
- The office will also require a shared workroom with equipment such as printers/photocopiers, scanners, shredders, etc.
- Separate staff restrooms apart from public restrooms should be provided.

FUNCTIONAL EXPRESSION FOR COURTHOUSE "FIELD OFFICE"

A field office for the Commonwealth Attorney may be provided in the courthouse when the main Commonwealth Attorney Office is in a location other than the courthouse.

- There should be a small reception area with chairs for people to wait. There should be a secure reception window where visitors may be received. Entry to the Office should be by means of a secure entrance controlled by the receptionist.
- The field office should be sized to accommodate attorney workspace(s) based on regular use and need.
- The office may require a separate conference/ interview room.
- The office may require a workroom with equipment such as printers/photocopiers, scanners, shredders, etc.

Adjacency and Circulation

- The Commonwealth's Attorney's Office should have a separate and readily identifiable public entry accessible from the public circulation zone.
- The general office area will be separated from the visitor waiting area by a secure entry and public reception counter.
- Because of the need to conduct interviews during the course of an investigation, the reception area should be directly accessible from the public areas of the building.
- The Commonwealth's Attorney's office should have access to the courtrooms, law library, and the clerks' offices by means of the public circulation system.



- Within the offices there should be a restricted circulation pattern connecting spaces used by the attorneys and staff.
- The Commonwealth's Attorney's Office must not be located near the Judges' chambers in order to maintain the separation of judicial and prosecutorial functions of the government.
- The Commonwealth's Attorney's Office is typically required to be accessible to staff after-hours and weekend access.

Security

- Duress alarms should be considered at all counter workstations and in one or more private offices. This allows staff in adjacent private offices to activate the alarm in the event front counter staff are unable to.
- Where office windows provide a line of sight from outside the courthouse, provide coverings on the windows positioned to let light in but to prevent a view into offices from outside the courthouse. Also, consideration should be given to applying security film (attack-rated) and/or tinting to windows, or in the case of significant risk and where feasible, replacing windows with ballistic-rated glazing. All ground floor windows should be attack rated at a minimum.
- Multiple egress routes should be provided to allow staff with more than one escape option in the event of an emergency situation.
- Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney private offices should be lockable.
- The Commonwealth's Attorney requires a secure room in which to locate a computer terminal connection to the State Police criminal database.

Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround space.
- Restrooms should be accessible.
- It is desirable that the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office be accessible from the main entrance for after-hours and weekend use.

Technology and Equipment

- Data and power connectivity should be provided in all offices.
- All private offices should include a desk suitably sized for one or more computer monitors, flat work surface, a docking station or personal computer, a keyboard/mouse, a desk chair, shelves and/or cabinets, and side chairs.
- It is anticipated that attorneys will be connected to an office network with access to legal databases, court case management systems, and offender and criminal history databases.

Commonwealth Attorney Victim/ Witness Program

Many jurisdictions have a victim/witness program to assist and aid victims who come to testify in court. These programs are part of the Commonwealth's Attorney's office. Depending upon the size of the court and the number of victims/witnesses, the space needs vary from one or two rooms where witnesses may wait to testify to more elaborate accommodations that include staff offices, interview rooms, child waiting rooms, and perhaps video conferencing equipment for remote testimony.

The entrance to the victim/witness office should be separate from the entrance to the main Commonwealth's Attorney's office.

Space Standard

- **Assistant Commonwealth Attorney Office:** 120-140 square feet



- **Reception:** The size of the reception for the public will vary depending upon the volume of foot traffic expected at any given time; assume 10-12 SF per person but no less than 100 SF in total.
- **Reception Counter:** Suggested size: 42 - 49 SF for a full-time counter workstation; 25-42 SF for an intermittently used counter workstation.
- **Victim/Witness Lounge:** Typically varies from 150-350 SF and accommodates a minimum of four individuals. Larger courthouses may have larger children and family waiting areas depending on anticipated use.

Functional Expression

- The victim/witness office space should provide a comfortable and secure environment for witnesses to wait until their case is heard.
- The victim/witness offices should be located in a quieter area of the building where victims can feel safe from public observation, and the layout should prevent visibility into the waiting/reception from the entry vestibule.
- Staff should have a private office. In small jurisdictions, staff may interview witnesses in their offices, while in busier courthouses, separate interview rooms may be required.
- The design of the victim/witness lounge should incorporate 'trauma-informed' design principles to reduce environmentally triggered stresses. Examples of strategies to consider include providing comfortable furniture, access to natural light and views, and selecting interior finishes with the intent of promoting a calming environment.
- The victim/witness lounge should be equipped with lounge seating and furniture, television monitors for remote courtroom viewing and remote interviews, and children's toys/games.
- A coffee/refreshment bar for use by victims and witnesses is desirable.
- Internal restrooms for use by victims and witnesses are desirable.

Adjacency and Circulation

- Access to the victim/witness office should be through a restricted and monitored entry and reception area.
- The victim/witness office should have convenient access to the courtrooms, but preferably not be in the main traffic flow.

Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround spaces throughout.

Security

- A reception counter with secure barrier will allow staff to control visitor access into the office and waiting area with a door release button and card access for staff.

Technology and Equipment

- Provisions should be made for remote video conferencing to allow vulnerable or child witnesses to testify by video.
- Data and power connectivity should be provided.
- All private offices should include a desk suitably sized for one or more computer monitors, flat work surface, a docking station or personal computer, a keyboard/mouse, a desk chair, shelves and/or cabinets, and side chairs.

Court Service Units (Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice)



The court service unit works in support of the J&DR court and facilitates the supervision, rehabilitation, and treatment as needed for those who come before the court. Essential functions of the Court Services Unit include:

- **Intake:** Provides service 24 hours a day at every Court Service Unit. Based on the information gathered, the officer determines whether a petition should be filed with the J&DR court and, if so, whether the juvenile should be released to the parents or detained pending a court hearing.
- **Investigations:** Conducts all background studies required by the judge in accordance with regulations issued by the Virginia Board of Juvenile Justice
- **Domestic Relations:** Provides services for domestic relations complaints, which can include non-support, family abuse, adjudication of custody (permanent and temporary), abuse and neglect, termination of parental rights, visitation rights, paternity, and emancipation.
- **Probation:** Provides community supervision and case management for delinquent children placed on probation.
- **Parole Services:** Supervises and provides community-based case management services to children in direct state care and those recently released from state institutional care.

A summary of the Court Service Units' essential functions is included below. Additional information can be found at the [Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice Website](#) and on the [Virginia Judicial System's website](#).

The space needs of Court Service Units are often accommodated within the confines of a courthouse. Accordingly, the following guidelines for these facilities are set forth.

Space Standard

Spaces commonly associate with Court Service Units:

- **Supervisor Office:** 130-150 SF
- **Private Staff Offices:** 120 - 140 SF
- **Open Office Workstation:** 36 – 64 SF
- **Reception/ Waiting:** The size of the reception/waiting for the public will vary depending upon the volume of foot traffic expected at any given time; assume 10-12 SF per person but no less than 100 SF in total.
- **Public Counter:** The size of the counter will vary depending upon the type of transactions occurring and frequency of use. Suggested size: 42 -49 SF for a full-time counter workstation; 25-42 SF for an intermittently used counter workstation.
- **Interview Rooms:** 80 – 120 SF depending on number of individuals.
- **Drug Testing/Urinalysis:** 60 – 80 SF.
- **Workrooms/Copy rooms:** Size varies based on size of operations and equipment needed (100 – 250 SF typical).
- **Supply closets/supply rooms:** Size varies based on size of operations (50 – 200 SF typical).
- **Conference rooms/ Trial preparation rooms:** Size varies based on the anticipated number of people attending regular meetings. A minimum of 100 SF, or 25 SF per occupant, is desirable. (e.g., a conference room sized for ten people may be approximately 250 SF).
- **Staff Breakrooms:** Size varies based on the number of staff expected to use the breakroom at any given time. A minimum of 120 SF, or 20 SF per occupant, is desirable (e.g., a breakroom sized for ten people may be approximately 200 SF).

Functional Expression



- Requirements include private interview rooms, private offices for court services staff, a small conference room, and records storage rooms.
- Interview rooms may be provided in a centralized location away from staff offices.
- If staff are going to use their private office to conduct interviews, the offices should be enlarged slightly to accommodate several people and for safety reasons.
- Offices should be acoustically soundproofed, particularly in situations where they double as interview rooms.
- Drug testing or urinalysis facilities may be required.

Adjacency and Circulation

- If located in the courthouse, court services should be located so that they are easily accessible from the main public entrance.
- Separate staff restrooms apart from public restrooms should be provided.

Security

- Controlled access from the public waiting areas should be provided.
- Where centralized interview rooms are provided, staff and the public should have separate access to those interview rooms.

Accessibility

- Provide wheelchair maneuvering and clear turnaround spaces throughout.

Technology and Equipment

- Sufficient data and power outlets should be provided for each office workstation.
- All private offices should include a desk suitably sized for one or more computer monitors, flat work surface, a docking station or personal computer, a keyboard/mouse, a desk chair, shelves and/or cabinets, and side chairs.

Court Programs and Related Agencies With Undefined Space Needs

Below are descriptions of various court-related agencies as well as court and court-related services and programs. Staffing for these sorts of agencies and functions may or may not require space within a courthouse. There may be a variety of space needed or desired by such agencies or programs, ranging from permanent space for staff to occasional conference or meeting room space. When planning for a new courthouse or a significant remodel of an existing courthouse, an effort should be undertaken to engage all relevant stakeholders to determine what kind of space, if any, may be needed to accommodate the agencies or functions described below.

Court Services and Programs

Interpreters / Services for limited English proficiency

The mission of the Foreign Language Services (FLS) Division is to assist individuals with limited English proficiency in overcoming language barriers to ensure equal access to Virginia's Judicial System. FLS provides interpretation and sight translation services, certifies and hires highly trained interpreters, and establishes and upholds the highest professional standards for the delivery of language services.



Additional information about FLS can be found on the Virginia Judicial System website: <https://www.courts.state.va.us/courtadmin/aoc/djs/programs/interpreters/home.html>

There should be clearly displayed signage as soon as one enters a courthouse to indicate the availability of free language access services. It is desirable for this message to appear in English and also in any languages that are commonly spoken in the community where the courthouse is situated. See [OES intranet site](#) and [Appendix A](#) for more detailed information regarding signage.

Information desks, along with translations of printed maps, forms, checklists, and brochures, located in courthouse lobbies offer assistance to LEP populations. An individual self-service computer kiosk with a translated application can also assist LEP populations when completing court forms that are suitable for filing in court.

Some courthouses may include space for an interpreter's unit. Examples of the types of spaces that may be required include:

- Reception/waiting area
- Public counter(s)
- Staff offices and/or workstations (hoteling workstations may be utilized for non-regular staff)
- Other office support spaces (e.g., conference room, work room, etc.)

Alternative Dispute Resolution

The Division of Dispute Resolution Services (DRS) is charged with providing an array of dispute resolution options within Virginia's court system and evaluating the effectiveness of programs offering such options. DRS oversees the certification of mediators and of mediation training programs in Virginia, and enforces standards of ethics and training guidelines for certified mediators. DRS promotes and monitors Judicial Settlement Conference programs in the Circuit Courts and court-referred mediation programs and Parent Education programs statewide.

Additional information about DRS can be found on the Virginia Judicial System website: <https://www.vacourts.gov/courtadmin/aoc/djs/programs/drs/about.html>.

Conferencing space should be provided in all courthouses and may be required for dispute resolution services.

Court Related Programs, Agencies and Services

Adult Probation (Virginia Department of Corrections)

When a defendant is sentenced in Circuit Court, a judge may order them to complete a period of supervised probation in lieu of serving a jail or prison sentence. The individual will then be assigned to a probation and parole officer to complete their probation. Depending on the various factors, a judge may order a period of supervised probation when an inmate is released from incarceration.

Additional information about adult probation can be found on the Virginia Department of Corrections website: <https://vadoc.virginia.gov/inmates-and-probationers/community-supervision/probation-parole/>

Some courthouses may include space for adult probation, particularly for probation intake functions. Examples of the types of spaces that may be required include:

- Reception/waiting area



- Public counter(s)
- Staff offices and workstations
- Drug testing facilities
- Other office support spaces (e.g., conference room, work room, etc.)

Court Appointed Special Advocates - CASA

The Virginia Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program provides trained volunteers to speak for abused and neglected children who are the subjects of juvenile court proceedings. CASA recruits, trains and supervises competent volunteers dedicated to advocating for the needs of abused and neglected children currently in court proceedings, who are too young to speak for themselves during the complicated maze of legal proceedings. CASA promotes safe, permanent homes for all children and seeks to educate the community concerning the needs of abused and neglected children.

CASA volunteers are appointed by judges to advocate for abused or neglected children, to make sure they don't get lost in the overburdened legal and social service system or languish in inappropriate group or foster homes. Volunteers stay with each case until it is closed and the child is placed in a safe, permanent home.

Additional information about CASA in Virginia can be found at: <https://virginiacasa.org/>

Some courthouses may include space for a CASA unit. Examples of the types of spaces that may be required include:

- Reception/waiting area
- Public counter(s)
- Staff offices and/or workstations (hoteling workstations may be utilized for non-regular staff)
- Other office support spaces (e.g., interview rooms, conference rooms, work room, etc.)

Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE)

In Virginia, the state agency that helps parents collect child support is part of the Department of Human Services. It is called the “Division of Child Support Enforcement” (DCSE). The DCSE can assist a parent with establishing a child support order and enforcing it if they apply for services. DCSE services are free.

Additional information about DCSE can be found on the Virginia Department of Social Services website: <https://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/dcse/>

Some courthouses may include space for DCSE. Examples of the types of spaces that may be required include:

- Reception/waiting area
- Public counter(s)
- Staff offices and/or workstations (hoteling workstations may be utilized for non-regular staff)
- Other office support spaces (e.g., interview rooms, conference rooms, work room, etc.)

Guardian Ad Litem

A guardian ad litem (GAL) in Virginia is an attorney appointed by a judge to assist the court in determining the circumstances of a matter before the court. It is the responsibility of the guardian ad litem to provide independent recommendations to the court about the client's best interests,



which can be different from advocating for what the client wants, and to bring balance to the decision-making process. The GAL may conduct interviews and investigations, make reports to the court, and participate in court hearings or mediation sessions.

The Office of the Executive Secretary, Supreme Court of Virginia, maintains lists of attorneys who are qualified GALs. There are two GAL programs: one for children and one for incapacitated persons. The children's program qualifies attorneys for appointment as a GAL for children in juvenile and domestic relations district courts and Circuit Courts. The incapacitated persons program qualifies attorneys for appointment as a GAL for incapacitated persons (adults) in guardianship and conservatorship proceedings in the Circuit Courts.

Additional information about the GAL program can be found on the Virginia Judicial System website <https://www.vacourts.gov/courtadmin/aoc/cip/programs/gal/home.html>

Some courthouses may include space for GAL programs. Examples of the types of spaces that may be required include:

- Reception/waiting area
- Public counter(s)
- Staff offices and/or workstations (hoteling workstations may be utilized for non-regular staff)
- Other office support spaces (e.g., interview rooms, conference rooms, work room, etc.)

Law Library

A law library located in the courthouse is optional. Courthouse law libraries are used by judges and private attorneys, and by the general public. A courthouse law library should be conveniently located to all users, particularly judges and law clerks. A public law library may also be part of a self-help center serving pro se litigants (See discussion of pro se litigants below for more information).

Where significant after-hours use of the library is anticipated, it should be designed with a separate after-hours entrance and arrangements made for after-hours security.

Some courthouses may include space for a law library. Examples of the types of spaces that may be warranted include:

- Public counter/reception desk
- Legal reference books
- Legal research workstations and terminals
- Worktables
- Staff offices and/or workstations
- Other office support spaces (e.g., work room, etc.)
- NOTE: See also discussion of pro se litigants – court resource center below for situations where a law library includes space for these functions.

Public Defender

The Virginia Indigent Defense Commission (VIDC) has twenty-eight Public Defender Offices and two satellite offices serving communities throughout the commonwealth. Each of the Public Defender Offices handles trial and appellate cases and try cases in the General District, J&DR, and Circuit Courts.



A field office for the Public Defender may be provided in the courthouse when the main Public Defender office is in a location other than the courthouse.

- There should be a small reception area with chairs for people to wait.
- There should be a secure reception window where visitors may be received. Entry to the office should be by means of a secure entrance controlled by the receptionist.
- The field office should be sized to accommodate attorney workspace(s) based on regular use and need.
- The office may require a separate conference/ interview room.
- The office may require a workroom with equipment such as printers/photocopiers, scanners, shredders, etc.

Additional information about the Office of the Public Defender can be found on the VIDC website:
<https://www.vadefenders.org/>

Accommodations for Specific Court User Groups

Below are descriptions of possible accommodations for specific court user groups. When planning for a new courthouse or a significant remodel of an existing courthouse, an effort should be undertaken to engage relevant stakeholders to determine if space might be made available for the benefit of any of the court user groups described below.

Pro se litigants – Court Resource Center

There are an increasing number of pro se litigants, particularly in general district and J&DR courts. These citizens desire and need detailed information and assistance with the tasks of handling their affairs on a pro se basis, particularly those who do not have a good understanding of the legal system and/or who may not have access to the internet or internet-connected devices. A court resource center is a location within the courthouse where pro se individuals may access court services, find information on the judicial process and the legal issues surrounding their case, research specific case information and court schedules, file documents, and make payments online.

Additionally, as digital access to court services expands, court resource centers can benefit all individuals entering the courthouse

Space considerations for court resource centers may include:

- Reception area.
- Meeting space for service providers.
- Remote access viewing rooms/pods.
- Open work areas (for use by both pro se litigants and the general public).
 - Work areas may include public access workstations and/or kiosks, worktables, and a court forms area.
- Larger meeting spaces for conducting legal clinics or other educational programs may be considered as part of a shared building amenity. (See [Chapter 3, Section 3.5](#), Public Spaces and Shared Building Amenities.)

Court resource centers may be located near or within clerk offices. When located adjacent to a clerk's office, the resource center should be situated so that the deputy clerks may monitor its use. An alternate location is the law library, if one is provided in the courthouse. Wherever they are located, court resource centers should be readily accessible from the main public corridor.



Press and News Media Accommodations

Most court proceedings are open to the public and the press. While the number of reporters in small communities probably would not be sufficient to warrant separate facilities, in larger courthouses with very active trial schedules, the number of reporters may be considerable. Providing space in which they may conduct interviews and work on notes would relieve congestion in the public corridors, helping to make the court less crowded and noisy. Even in smaller courthouses where a separate room may not be practical, an area of the public space might be made to serve the needs of the occasional reporter or television news team.

In many multi-judge courts, some accommodation, such as a media/press room, is desirable for the day-to-day activities of the press and should be located close to the courtrooms where the media is most likely present.

Space considerations for a media/press room may include:

- Conference table(s) or worktables (may be flexibly arranged).
- AV systems required for viewing of court proceedings remotely.
- Larger spaces for conducting press briefings may be considered as part of a shared building amenity. (See [Chapter 3, Section 3.5](#), Public Spaces and Shared Building Amenities.)

Police Waiting/Workroom

On busy court days, such as when traffic court is held, large numbers of police officers may be in the courthouse waiting to testify. By providing officers with a designated area outside the public corridors where they may wait while being readily available, rather than waiting in other court offices or the courtroom, helps to reduce the congestion in the corridors. Here, they may complete reports, review testimony, make phone calls, converse, and relax before their court appearance or during recesses.

The size of the waiting area will depend upon the number of officers present in the courthouse on the typical court day. Planning should consider at least 25 square feet per officer. The workroom should be located near the courtrooms and be readily accessible from the public corridor. The workroom should be furnished similarly to the attorney lounge, with sofas, chairs, worktables, and telephones.

Space considerations for a police waiting/workroom may include:

- Conference table(s) or worktables (may be flexibly arranged).
- Comfortable seating.

Attorney Workroom

In large multi-judge courts, consideration may be given to providing a workroom for the use of private attorneys. Such an area is a useful convenience for attorneys while waiting for trials to begin or between hearings. The workroom may be used for group meetings, conferences with colleagues, making telephone calls, and for reading, reviewing case materials, or writing. The workroom should be located near the courtrooms and should be accessible to the law library.

Space considerations for a police waiting/workroom may include:

- Conference table(s) or worktables (may be flexibly arranged).
- Adequate seating.



Attorneys may alternatively utilize a shared building work area/public meeting cafe when provided in the courthouse. (See [Chapter 3, Section 3.5](#), Shared Building Amenities for more information.)

3.8 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED SPACE STANDARDS

The space standards recommended in this document are based on current best practices for court facilities, drawing on examples from recent courthouse construction projects in Virginia and across the country. Ultimately, space requirements should be determined through an analysis of current and anticipated operational practices and should be expressed in terms of square footage.

This section includes a summary of the recommended ranges of space standards, in terms of square footage, which are also set forth for each courthouse component covered in [Chapter 3](#).

Recommended Range of Space Standards		Recommended Space Standards Expressed in Net Square Feet (NSF)
Description		* Indicates items where space requirements will vary based on specific programming needs, volume of activity, or code requirements.
Public Areas		
Public Parking (per parking spot)		350 - 400
Public Queuing Area		14/person
Screening Station		180-220
Security Booth		100 - 120
Public Lobby		*
Information Booth / Information Kiosk		80-120
Courtroom Public Waiting		*
Children and Family Waiting Area		150-350
Public Toilet Rooms		*
Court Set Space		
Standard Circuit Courtroom		1,400-1,600
Large Circuit/ Ceremonial Courtroom		2,000-2,200
Standard General District Courtroom		1,200-1,400
Large General District Courtroom		2,000-2,200
Standard Juvenile & Domestic Relations Courtroom		1,000-1,200
Large Juvenile & Domestic Relations Courtroom		1,200-1,400
Hearing Room		1,040
Courtroom / Hearing Room Entry Vestibule		64 - 80
Attorney / Client Conference Room		80 - 120
Witness Waiting / Victim Waiting Room		120-220
Exhibit / Evidence Storage		*



Courtroom / Court -Floor Holding	60 - 100
Courtroom Holding Interview Booth	60 - 80
Public Circulation Corridors (in front of courtrooms)	10 - 14
Children/Family Waiting Areas	150 - 350
Courtroom Components	
Judge's Bench	40 - 60
Clerk Workstation (one occupant)	30 - 40
Clerk Workstation (two occupants)	50 - 70
Witness Stand	20 - 30
Jury Box	175 - 200
Court Reporter	15 - 20
Counsel Tables	35 - 50
Presentation Stand	10 - 15
Public Gallery (per person)	5 - 8
Judicial Chamber Space	
Circuit Judge	300 - 380
District Judge	250 - 325
Visiting Judge (up to 2)	250 - 325
Chambers Reception and Secretary Office	150-200
Copy / Workroom / Supply Area	50-80
Law Clerk	100-120
Jury Functions	
Reception/Registration	0-300
Jury Assembly Room	20-25/person
Coffee and Snack Area	115
Staff Workstation	48
Jury Deliberation	300-350
Jury Deliberation Restroom (2)	50-56/each
Jury Deliberation Vestibule	50-60
Coat Closet	10
Grand Jury	265-400
Clerk Areas	
Elected Circuit Court Clerk Private Office	300 - 380
General District Court Clerk Private Office	180 - 240
Juvenile & Domestic Relations Clerk Private Office	180 - 240
Full-time Counter Workstations	42 - 49
Intermittently Used Counter Workstations	24 -30
Counter Reception Areas	10 - 12/person in queue



Large Workstation	72-80
Standard Workstation	36-64
Workrooms/Copy Rooms	100 – 250
Supply Closets/Supply Rooms	50 – 200
Conference Rooms	25/occupant
Focus Rooms (2-3 capacity)	80 - 100
Huddle Rooms (4-6 capacity)	100 - 160
Staff Breakrooms	20/occupant
Staff Restrooms	*
Public Records Review Areas	25/occupant
Records Room	*
Exhibit Storage	100
Magistrates' Office Suite	
Private Office	120
Private Office Workstation	42 – 64
Private Office Restroom	56
Private Office Breakroom or Kitchenette	50 – 120
Private Office Supply Closet	10 - 25
Data/IT closet	10 - 25
Private Office Bailiff	80 - 100
Private Office Private Restroom	49 - 56
Citizen Hearing/Proceeding Room (2-3 people)	80 – 100
In-custody Hearing/Proceeding Room	100
Public Waiting Area (per person)	10 - 12
Regional Supervisor/Chief Admin Office	120
Each Workstation in Admin Office	42 - 64
Workstation	
Large	72-80
Standard	36-64
Counter workstation	42-49
Secure Courthouse Areas	
Command Center	180 - 250
Large Central Holding Cell (15-30 person capacity)	200 – 320
Medium Central Holding Cell (10-person capacity)	160
Large Central Holding Cell (up to 4-person capacity)	70
In-custody Control Room	180 -250
Courtroom-Adjacent Holding Cell (up to 4-person capacity)	100
Courtroom-Adjacent Holding Cell (1 person capacity)	70



In-Custody Interview Booth	60 – 80
Courtroom Area for Violent Defendant (up to 4-person capacity)	100
Courtroom Area for Violent Defendant (1-person capacity)	70
Secure Judicial Parking (per parking spot)	350 - 400
Data Closet	50
Server and Data Room (intermediate distribution frame)	100 – 120
Commonwealth's Attorney Offices (including victim/witness).	
Note: The Commonwealth's Attorneys Offices are "Non Judicial Branch Agencies."	
The Commonwealth's Attorney Private Office	300 – 380
Assistant Commonwealth Attorneys	120 - 140
Open Office Workstation	36 – 64
Reception/Waiting (per person)	10 – 12
Full Time Public Counter Workspace	42 - 49
Intermittently Used Public Counter Workspace	25 - 42
Interview Rooms	80 - 120
Workrooms/Copy Rooms	100 – 125
Supply Closets/Rooms	50 – 200
Conference Rooms/Trial Preparation Rooms (per occupant)	25
Staff Breakrooms (per occupant)	20
Victim/Witness Lounge (at least four occupants)	150 - 350
Court Service Units	
Note: The Court Service Units are "Non Judicial Branch Agencies."	
Supervisor Office	130 - 150
Private Staff Offices	120 - 140
Open Office Workstations	36 - 64
Reception/Waiting (per person)	10 - 12
Full Time Public Counter Workspace	42 - 49
Intermittently Used Public Counter Workspace	25 - 42
Interview Rooms	80 – 120
Drug Testing/Urinalysis Room	60 – 80
Workrooms/Copy rooms	100 – 250
Supply Closets/rooms	50 – 200
Conference Rooms/Trial Preparation Rooms (per occupant)	25
Staff Breakrooms (per occupant)	20



APPENDIX A – ADDITIONAL TECHNICAL GUIDANCE

A-1: AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA)

ADA Background Information:

The laws on accessibility in public buildings such as courthouses were significantly strengthened by the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. The Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 mandated the removal of barriers in buildings and facilities constructed or altered by the federal government or with federal funds after 1969 (or after 1977 in the case of leased facilities).

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits recipients of federal financial assistance from discriminating on the basis of handicap. This legislation also required "program accessibility" in existing buildings. A program or activity "when viewed in its entirety" must be "readily accessible to handicapped persons ... through such means as redesign of equipment or reassignment of classes or other services." It mandated accessibility to government services but did not require the physical removal of existing barriers. Recipients of federal aid were permitted to reschedule their services to make them accessible to the handicapped. Amendments in 1978 extended the mandate to "programs conducted by federal agencies," as well as to recipients of federal funds.

On June 20, 1994, the Access Board published in the Federal Register an interim rule for judicial facilities (Section 11) to ADAAG. On that same date, the Department of Justice and the Department of Transportation published notices of proposed rulemaking to adopt sections 11 through 14 as standards.

Most recently, the Department of Justice published revised regulations for Titles II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 in the Federal Register on September 15, 2010.

For information about the ADA visit the ADA website at: www.ada.gov and the U.S. Access Board website at: <https://www.access-board.gov/ada/>

Ada Standards Pertaining to Judicial Facilities:

The following are brief summaries of some of the standards pertaining to judicial facilities. This is not intended to be an exhaustive discussion of accessibility standards but should serve to provide general guidance concerning some of the major requirements.

Courttrooms

The leading issue in designing accessible courthouses is wheelchair access to raised areas such as jury boxes, witness stands, and judges' benches. The ADA requires that all public areas of the courtroom (public seating, witness stand, attorney tables, jury box, court reporter stations, and bailiff location) must be located on an accessible route and accommodate a wheelchair.

Areas that are accessed by ramps or platform lifts shall provide unobstructed turning space. Vertical access to a raised judge's bench or courtroom Clerks' workstation need not be installed immediately, provided that the areas maneuvering spaces, and, if appropriate, electrical service are installed at the time of initial construction to permit future installation of either ramps or lifts without requiring substantial reconstruction of the space.



While the Access Board generally discourages the use of platform lifts, they are allowed in courtrooms and have become a common means of providing access to witness stands and judges' benches. Common issues, however, include platform deflection and downward settlement; interlock malfunctions; and operation requiring assistance such as the removal of steps, platforms or millwork.

Ramps often are preferred for a number of reasons. While ramps may take up more space, they generally cost less than lifts and are easily constructed. Ramps require minimal maintenance and require railings only if the level change is greater than 6 inches. No power source is required, nor are mechanical parts that can malfunction involved. Most importantly, ramps permit all users, including people who use wheelchairs, to use the element independently, with no disruption to court proceedings. Ramps are always useable in case of emergency evacuation and require no assistance.

The following are the minimum requirements for ramps that are utilized as part of an accessible route:

- Ramps must be permanent, not pull-out, flip-down or removable.
- Ramps must provide a minimum clear width of 36 inches between handrails.
- Landings where ramps change directions must have a minimum dimension of 60 inches x 60 inches.
- If a door is located at the top or bottom of a ramp, the landing must be large enough for adequate maneuvering clearances at the door. If the door swings back over the landing, there must be adequate landing space to back up to clear the door swing.
- Raised platforms accessed by ramps must have a turning space to allow an individual to turn around to go down the ramp.
- Ramps must have a maximum slope of 1:12.
- Ramp runs and landings with drop-offs must have edge protection, such as a curb, barrier, or extended surface as specified in the guidelines.
- Ramps with a rise of greater than 6 inches need handrails. Handrails must be located along both sides of a ramp at a height above the ramp surface of 34 inches to 38 inches measured to the top of the handrail.
- Most model building codes require a guard where there is a drop-off of more than 30 inches. If the ramp or landing has such a drop-off along any side, it must also have a guard at that location in addition to handrails. The minimum height of a guard is 42 inches with maximum openings of 4 inches.

The following are recommended best practices:

- Ramps should not be located where they will be a tripping hazard for other circulation routes through the space.
- Ramps should not be located where they will block the means of egress, including maneuvering clearances at doors.
- Ramps should be located along the same path of travel as provided for the general population.
- When ramps are exterior, they should be located or designed to limit the accumulation of water, ice and snow.
- When ramps lead to doors that may be locked, a turning space should be provided at the door to allow someone to turn around if they cannot enter. This is also advisable at exterior doors because the force to open the door may be too high for some people with disabilities to operate.
- Although ramps with a rise of 6 inches or less are not required to have handrails, where possible, handrails to provide stability for people with ambulatory impairments are recommended for all ramps.



Public Seating/Gallery

The public seating area of the courtroom is treated as an assembly area and must include adequate wheelchair seating space based on the size and occupancy of the courtroom public seating gallery. Also, all courtrooms must be equipped with assistive listening devices.

Jury Boxes and Witness Stands

All jury boxes and witness stands are required to be fully accessible. Section 808.3 requires that each jury box and witness stand should be large enough to accommodate a wheelchair within its defined area. In alterations, the wheelchair spaces may be located outside the defined area of the jury box or witness stand, if the ramp or lift access poses a hazard to any required egress from the courtroom.

A simple solution to both jury box and witness accessibility is to place the first tier of the jury box, and the witness stand at floor level, thus eliminating the need for ramps or lifts at these locations. Care needs to be exercised, however, to ensure that this does not interfere with proper sightlines within the courtroom. Depending on the location of the witness stand, lowering it to floor level may partially obstruct the view of the witness by attorneys or some jurors.

Judges' Benches and Courtroom Workstations

Judges' benches and workstations for clerks and other court personnel must be accessible. The ADA and ABA guidelines provide an exception for vertical access to judges' benches and raised employee stations. Under this exception, it is not required to provide vertical access at the time of construction provided that clear floor space, maneuvering space, and electrical service for lifts are provided at the time of initial construction for later installation of lifts for ramps.

A preferred practice for vertical access to judges' benches is locating ramps or lifts outside the courtroom or at least out of view from the well and public gallery.

Further, for purposes of emergency or security evacuation, as well as ease of independent operation, judges may prefer ramp access.

Court Reporter's Station

The court reporter's station must be accessible with adequate access to the work area and maneuvering room.

Counsel Tables

The counsel tables must be accessible with adequate maneuvering room behind the table. Microphones should be movable and have a long neck. Connections to present Evidence from laptops should be made available at each table.

Jury Areas

Jury Assembly

If provided, the jury assembly area shall be on an accessible route from the main public entrance and provide a minimum of 5% wheelchair accessible spaces at any fixed or built-in seating or tables. Refreshment areas, kitchenettes and fixed or built-in refreshment dispensers are to be fully accessible. If fixed seating is used, the number of accessible wheelchair spaces, location, and



dispersal must comply with those requirements for assembly areas included in the ADA Accessibility Guidelines.

Jury Deliberation

Jury deliberation rooms shall accommodate at least one accessible wheelchair space. Other requirements are identical to those required for the jury assembly room. Refreshment area, kitchenette, and toilets must be accessible.

Holding Facilities

Where separate central holding cells or court floor holding cells are provided for adult male, juvenile male, adult female or juvenile female, one of each type at each location must be accessible. Where central-holding cells are provided, which are not separated by age or sex, at least one cell shall be accessible. Secure Box Video conferencing should be considered for at least one holding cell if there are any possibilities that a removed subject may need to continue their hearing from that location.

Each accessible cell shall provide an accessible turning space, doors, toilets, lavatories, grab bars, and drinking fountain. An exception is allowed for doors operated only by security personnel.

Other Courthouse Areas

- Parking spaces – Designation of handicapped parking.
- Entrances to buildings – Use of ramps.
- Elevators – Use of Braille lettering and audio recordings for identification.
- Restrooms – Design of lavatories and toilets.
- Drinking fountains – Lower height.
- Entrance doors to all offices – use of wide doors with lever type door handles.
- Clerks' counters and public access computer terminals – Lower counter height.
- Records room – Increased space between aisles and entrances.
- Public telephone – wheelchair accessible



A-2: LIGHTING – RECOMMENDED ILLUMINATION LEVELS

Recommended Interior Illumination Levels¹¹

SPACE DESCRIPTION*	RECOMMENDED HORIZONTAL ILLUMINATION LEVEL (FC)†	RECOMMENDED VERTICAL ILLUMINATION LEVEL (FC)‡	OTHER CONSIDERATIONS
Courtrooms			
Judge's Bench	45–55	19	Additional task lighting may be desirable from ceiling.
Clerk's Desk	45–55	19	Additional task lighting may be desirable from ceiling.
Spectator Seating	15–25	5	
Litigant's Table	45–55	19	Additional task lighting may be desirable from ceiling.
Podium	45–55	19	Additional adjustable task lighting is recommended.
Witness Chair	30–40	14	
Offices			
Intensive VDT use offices	30–40	—	Additional task lighting may be desirable.
Intermittent VDT use offices	45–55	—	Additional task lighting may be desirable.
Other Areas			
Conference Rooms	30–40	7–28	
Jury Assembly Areas	10–30	5–19	Provide multiple levels of light for various room functions.
Waiting Areas/Lounges/ Cafés	10	—	
High-Density Files	—	7–19	Provide vertical illumination to within 30" of the floor.
Public and Private Circulation	15–20	—	
Staff Circulation	5–10	—	
Public Lobbies	15–20	—	
Holding Areas	25–35	5–9	
Restrooms	10–20	3–19	
Mechanical/Plumbing Rooms	10	—	
Electrical/Audiovisual (AV)/ Telecom Rooms	50	—	

¹¹ These recommended illumination levels were developed by the Judicial Council of California as part of the 2020 California Trial Court Facility Standards. They are included here for reference purposes and can be accessed at: <https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/facilities-2020-Standards-DRAFT-FOR-COMMENT.pdf>



* For areas not listed, refer to the latest edition of the Illuminating Engineering Society (IES) *Lighting Handbook* for light-level guidelines. Because the IES *Lighting Handbook* may be updated periodically,

† FC = foot-candles. Value ranges are for average general illumination at work-plane height, unless noted otherwise. Task illumination requirements are higher.

‡ Value ranges are for average illumination at facial height, unless otherwise noted.

VDT = visual display terminal.

Recommended Exterior Illumination Levels

SPACE DESCRIPTION*	RECOMMENDED MINIMUM HORIZONTAL ILLUMINATION LEVEL (FC) [†]	RECOMMENDED MINIMUM VERTICAL ILLUMINATION LEVEL (FC) [‡]	OTHER CONSIDERATIONS
Parking Areas			
Parking Garage—General	1.0	0.5	
Parking Garage—Ramps	1.0	0.5	Daytime minimum horizontal is 2.0 FC. Daytime minimum vertical is 1.0 FC.
Parking Garage—Entrance	1.0	0.5	Daytime minimum horizontal is 50 FC. Daytime minimum vertical is 25 FC. Daytime light level may include daylight.
Parking Garage—Stairways	2.0	1.0	
Open Parking Lots	0.5 (asphalt) 1.0 (concrete)	0.25	Provide 15:1 maximum-to-minimum uniformity ratio.
Other Exterior Areas			
Active Building Entries	5.0 Average	3.0	
Inactive Building Entries	3.0 Average	3.0	
Pedestrian Pathways	1.0	0.3–0.65	
Stairways	1.0	0.3–0.60	

* For areas not listed, refer to the latest edition of the Illuminating Engineering Society (IES) *Lighting Handbook* for light-level guidelines. Because the IES *Lighting Handbook* may be updated periodically,

† Value ranges are for average general illumination at work-plane height, unless noted otherwise. All exterior target light levels are to be determined per project based on security equipment, local ordinances (if any), and emergency egress requirements.

‡ Value ranges are for average illumination at facial height, unless otherwise noted.

A-3: TECHNICAL GUIDELINES FOR ACOUSTICS

The following guidelines address the design and specification of acoustical requirements in various courthouse spaces. Please note that acoustical performance is based on the final building configuration, materials selection, and building systems design and specification and should be confirmed by an acoustical engineer to ensure performance goals are being met.

Background Noise Control and Noise Criteria (NC) Values

Please refer to the table below for optimal Noise Control (NC) values for courtrooms and ancillary building spaces. These levels represent the acoustic design goal for interior spaces to ensure that the



level of background noise is unobtrusive and low enough so it does not interfere with the function of the planned spaces.

Background Noise Criteria	
Noise Criteria	Space Type-Room
NC 30	Courtrooms, Training/Jury Room and Jury Deliberation Room
NC 35	Judicial Chambers, Private Offices, Conference Rooms
NC 40	Reception Areas, Workrooms, Open Office, Secure Corridors
NC 45	Public Lobby and Corridors

Sound Transmission Control (STC) Values

The optimal Sound Transmission Control (STC) value for partitions between courtrooms and adjoining spaces varies between 45 STC and 65 STC depending on the use and NC value of the adjoining spaces. Please refer to the table below for optimal STC values for partitions separating courtrooms and ancillary building spaces.

Sound Isolation Requirements (Walls)	
Space Type and Adjacency	STC of Partition
Courtroom to restroom (with plumbing in wall) Courtroom to mechanical space Courtroom to holding cells	60
Courtroom to courtroom Jury deliberation to adjoining areas Courtroom to restroom (no plumbing in wall)	55
Courtrooms to adjacent areas Jury Deliberation to adjacent areas Conference rooms to adjoining areas	50
Judicial chambers to adjoining areas Private offices to adjoining areas	45
General Office to General Office	40

Example interior acoustic partition specification (STC 60): Chase Wall with two independent rows of 2-1/2" steel studs 24" on center separated by a minimum of 1" clear airspace and two layers of 2-1/2" acoustical batt insulation faced with two layers of 5/8" gypsum board each side. Additional layers of gypsum board will increase acoustic performance. (Note: STC Values indicated here are for preliminary purposes only; actual performance must be confirmed upon final design specification and manufacturer selection)

Example interior acoustic partition specification (STC 55): Chase Wall with two independent rows of 2-1/2" steel studs 24" on center separated by a minimum of 1" clear airspace and two layers of 2-1/2" acoustical batt insulation faced with 5/8" gypsum board each side. Additional layers of gypsum board will increase acoustic performance. (Note: STC Values indicated here are for preliminary purposes only; actual performance must be confirmed upon final design specification and manufacturer selection)



Example interior acoustic partition specification (STC 50): 6" steel studs 24" on center, 3-1/2" acoustical batt insulation faced with 5/8" gypsum board each side. Additional layers of gypsum board will increase acoustic performance. (Note: STC Values indicated here are for preliminary purposes only; actual performance must be confirmed upon final design specification and manufacturer selection)

Example interior acoustic partition specification (STC 45): 3-5/8" steel studs 24" on center, 3-1/2" acoustical batt insulation faced with 5/8" gypsum board each side. Additional layers of gypsum board will increase acoustic performance. (Note: STC Values indicated here are for preliminary purposes only; actual performance must be confirmed upon final design specification and manufacturer selection)

Courtroom Doors: Should provide sufficient transmission loss performance so that partition sound isolation is not compromised.

- A minimum 1-3/4" solid-core wood door or hollow metal steel door with a full set of acoustical seals including perimeter gasketing, and a removable center post or overlapping astragal between double doors is recommended.
- The bottoms of the soundproof doors are the hardest part of an acoustical assembly to maintain sound control. Automatic door bottoms with drop down gasketing provide a good seal but require periodic maintenance to align seals.
- Doors with cam-lift hinges and thresholds can provide good sound isolation. The cam lift hinge allows the soundproof door to be lifted up during the opening cycle and allows the door to drop during the closing cycle, this helps the door bottom achieve a positive seal on the acoustical threshold.
- For standard hinges, use a threshold with integral gasketing.
- Do not use noisy panic bar hardware.
- Courtroom public entrance doors should include vision panels.

Mechanical, Plumbing and Electrical Equipment Noise Control: Special care should be taken to ensure that proper sound isolation is achieved and that NC values within courtrooms are not negatively affected by building mechanical, plumbing and electrical systems.



APPENDIX B – COURTHOUSE REFERENCE IMAGES



Courthouse Exterior Reference Images



Montgomery County Courthouse Exterior



Norfolk Courthouse Exterior



Hanover County Courthouse Exterior



Goochland County Courthouse Exterior



Courthouse Exterior Reference Images



Richmond JDR Courthouse Exterior



Richmond JDR Courthouse Exterior



Hampton County Circuit Courthouse Exterior



Public Spaces Reference Images



Norfolk Courthouse Waiting and Work Area



Norfolk Courthouse Waiting and Cafe



Richmond JDR Courthouse Information Desk



Richmond JDR Courthouse Public Corridor



Public Spaces Reference Images



Hanover County Courthouse Child Waiting Room



Hanover County Courthouse Public Waiting Area



Montgomery County Courthouse Public Corridor



Washington County Courthouse Lobby



Courtroom Reference Images



Hampton County Courtroom



Montgomery County Courtroom



Washington County JDR Courtroom



Courtroom Reference Images



Hanover County Circuit Court Courtroom



Hanover County Circuit Court Courtroom



Meeting Spaces Reference Images



Attorney Client Conference



Attorney Client Conference



Staff Conference Room



Jury Deliberation Room



Public Counter Reference Images



Clerk Public Counter



Clerk Public Counter



Clerk Public Counter



Clerk Public Counter Workstations



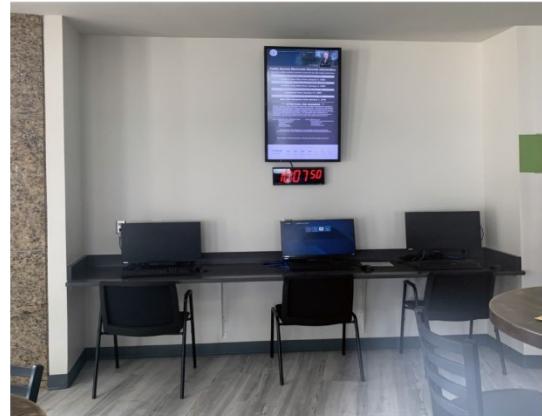
Public Service Area Reference Images



Public Record's Review Room



Public Access Area



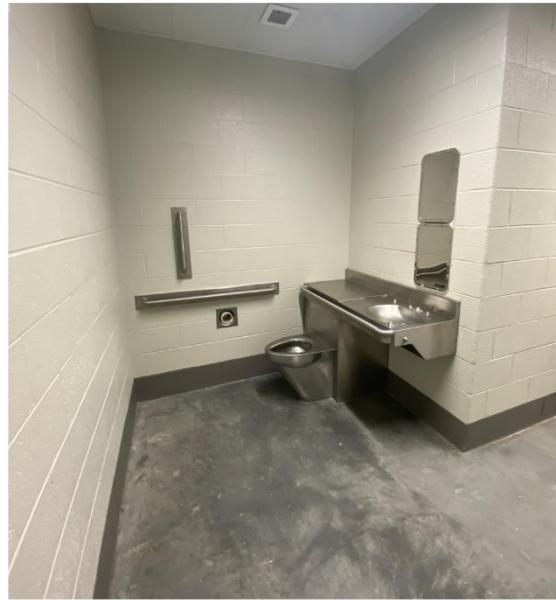
Public Access Area



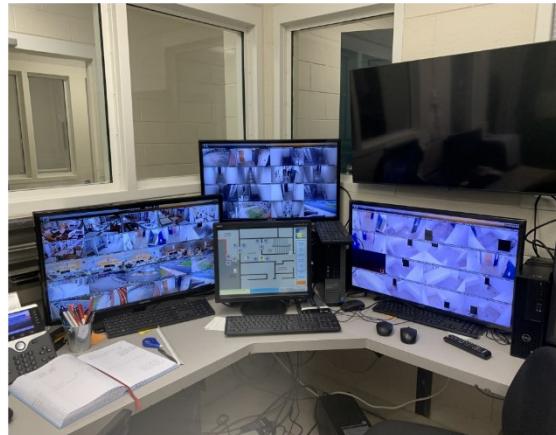
Secure Areas Reference Images



Attorney /In-Custody Non-Contact Interview Room



Holding Cell



Security Control Room



Secure Areas Reference Images



Secure Holding Corridor



Security Screening



Security Screening