

# CIVIC CENTER SECURITY REVISITED

## SUMMARY

In mid-2002, when our country was still reeling from the effects of 9/11, the Marin County Grand Jury undertook an investigation of security at the Marin County Civic Center (Civic Center). The Grand Jury published a long series of Recommendations, which were promptly forwarded to both the Board of Supervisors and the County Sheriff for response.

The responses to the Grand Jury's Recommendations for the most part resulted in consideration, but not implementation, of a large number of initiatives. Marin County, however, has not stood still with regard to Civic Center security, and has implemented a number of other initiatives. These were in the areas of comprehensive emergency plans, countywide initiatives, Civic Center improvements, and related local initiatives. This Grand Jury has also found that a number of initiatives such as installation of new cameras, installation of key card access systems, relocation of the courts, and relocation of the library that could enhance the security of the Civic Center are either in progress or under consideration.

Recognizing that creating a perfectly secure Civic Center is not realistic (and probably not desirable because of costs and the impact it would have on the appearance and ambience of this Frank Lloyd Wright-designed building), the Grand Jury believes and recommends that:

- The County should continue in its efforts to continuously upgrade security at the Civic Center and that its focus should include natural disasters as well as incidents created by violent people
- The County should immediately make specified enhancements to security
- The County should expedite enhancements that are in progress
- The County should consider adding "police security officers" as a source of visible security

## BACKGROUND

The Marin County Civic Center is a unique building complex, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. It was aesthetically designed to fit into the landscape, with earth-colored walls and sky-colored roofs. At the time of its design, we lived in a simpler era, where security had a different meaning and a different level of priority. The building has a very open design, allowing essentially free access to the public.

The 2001-2002 Marin County Civil Grand Jury did issue a list of Recommendations regarding security at the Civic Center. The openness of the building's design, coupled with the free access accorded to the public, has led to issues of security that have taken on an even greater prominence today. Therefore, the current Grand Jury has made its own investigation of the level of security at the Civic Center, has reviewed the status of the Recommendations made by the previous Grand Jury, and also reviewed steps taken by the County with regard to security.

## METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury conducted interviews with individuals from the Sheriff's Department, staff at the Civic Center Office of Emergency Services (OES), staff in the Public Works Department, staff in the Marin County District Attorney's office, members of the 2001-2002 Grand Jury, members of the Frank Lloyd Wright Civic Center Conservancy (the Conservancy), members of the Board of Supervisors (BOS), County Administration, and fire and law enforcement officers from the City of San Rafael.

The Grand Jury did a walk-through of the Civic Center and made personal observations of:

- Civic Center Security Systems
  - ❖ Surveillance cameras
  - ❖ Customized security keys
  - ❖ Card systems technology
  - ❖ Panic hardware on doors
  - ❖ Fire exits
  - ❖ Sectional and security doors in Hall of Justice/Administration Buildings
- Court floor
- Court Services Offices
- County Jail Communications Center

The Grand Jury reviewed the following documents.

- 2001-2002 Grand Jury report titled "Marin Civic Center: A Security Challenge"
- Executive Summary, dated July 2003, by Consultants on Master Planning Project on the 20-year Court Facilities Master Plan for the Superior Court of California, County of Marin
- Report by Judicial Council of California, Administrative Office of the Courts, dated February 12, 2004, Facilities Planning: Trial Court Five-Year Capital Outlay Plan
- Responses by the BOS and Sheriff on the Findings and Recommendations to the Grand Jury report of 2001-2002 titled "Marin Civic Center: A Security Challenge"
- Correspondence of the Grand Jury members 2001-2002 regarding the responses given by the BOS and Sheriff to their Civic Center report
- Memorandum on security enhancements and costs, dated February 10, 2004
- Information on building security projects completed and expenditures made, dated February 18, 2004
- Court Executive Officer memorandum to Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), dated July 7, 2003, on "Court Security—An Overriding Priority"
- Undated report by Sheriff's Department reviewing current building security and ways to improve it
- Several articles published in local newspapers regarding Civic Center security

## DISCUSSION

The previous Marin County Grand Jury report made comprehensive lists of Findings and Recommendations regarding security at the Civic Center. Several of these Recommendations were accepted in whole; some were agreed to in principle but were awaiting implementation for budgetary and other reasons; some were agreed to in part; and some were rejected as not feasible.

## **Status of Recommendations from the 2001-2002 Grand Jury**

The Grand Jury met with County officials to inventory Recommendations made by the 2001-2002 Grand Jury. For the most part, the 2001-2002 Grand Jury suggested areas where security enhancements could be explored. By the time the 2001-2002 Grand Jury's report was issued, some of the security enhancements had already been implemented. Most, however, required further study.

Our study led to two findings. First, many of the suggested security enhancements did indeed receive further study, in most cases through meetings with relevant County officials and departments. Second, those studies led to little change.

The two County officials who were asked about the responses to the previous Grand Jury's report expressed a constant rationale behind the actions of the County officials and departments. First, the Civic Center's design makes many major security enhancements logistically difficult to implement. Second, the Civic Center's design generates additional budgetary problems for such enhancements. Third, the Civic Center is not high on the list of terrorist targets. Fourth, the tradeoffs (public access, aesthetics, and cost) generally outweigh the marginal value of security enhancements.

## **Steps Being Taken That Impact Security at the Civic Center**

Notwithstanding the response to the Recommendations of the 2001-2002 Grand Jury's report, a large number of security initiatives were implemented over the past few years which are noted below.

- The Marin Civic Center Building Emergency Plan – security enhancement measures
  - ❖ Group Alert System (internal audio alert system)
  - ❖ Assistance to disabled (buddy system)
  - ❖ Backup emergency power
  - ❖ Building evacuation team
  - ❖ Employee training
  - ❖ Evacuation drills
- The Marin Civic Center Building Emergency Plan – procedural aspects
  - ❖ Medical
  - ❖ Fire
  - ❖ Bomb threat
  - ❖ Violent incident
  - ❖ Earthquake
  - ❖ Winter storm
  - ❖ Suspicious mail
  - ❖ Hazardous material
  - ❖ Evacuation
  - ❖ Assistance to disabled
  - ❖ Shelter in place (procedures in case it is preferable to remain on the premises rather than evacuate)
- Countywide initiatives
  - ❖ The County has hired a Risk Manager
  - ❖ Countywide program to register and train safety personnel

- ❖ The BOS allocated \$500,000 for increased security (of this amount, approximately \$100,000 has been spent). The Grand Jury understands that the balance of this allocation is unencumbered and could revert to the County for other purposes
- ❖ New, enhanced county communications in the OES
- ❖ MERA – countywide communications system
- Civic Center improvements
  - ❖ Key card access system (card reader, computer system upgrade, employee cards)
  - ❖ Security shifts have an electronic system to let the control unit know where they have been
  - ❖ Customized security keys (key blanks have unique cuts to inhibit duplication, blanks are held by the County, key gradations limit access to certain areas)
  - ❖ New camera installation (proposed)
  - ❖ Enhanced background checks and fingerprinting of certain employees
  - ❖ New uniforms for night staff to identify them as security – note, this staff is weaponless
  - ❖ Certain departments, but not all, require badges be worn
  - ❖ Lighting enhanced in parking lots
  - ❖ Terrorist exercise (tested WMD protocols)
  - ❖ Trash in hallways has been materially reduced since completion of seismic retrofit
- Local initiatives
  - ❖ Triennial fire inspection conducted by the San Rafael Fire Department
  - ❖ Mutual aid agreement between Sheriff and San Rafael Police Department

This list suggests that security at the Civic Center is undergoing continuous enhancement.

### **The Influence of the Conservancy and Other Interested Parties**

The legacy of Frank Lloyd Wright buildings is that a higher than typical level of oversight is likely if and when changes to such buildings are contemplated. The Grand Jury has spoken to a number of entities that could provide such oversight:

- The Conservancy is an advisory board that oversees the aesthetics of the Civic Center when internal changes are proposed. In general, the Conservancy has not vetoed proposed changes but only has suggested modifications to maintain aesthetics. The Conservancy understands that the Civic Center is not static, but is a living, working building.  
Most interviewees have confirmed the role of the Conservancy. However, a few have maintained that the presence of the Conservancy has inhibited speedy implementation of changes
- The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation (Taliesin and Taliesin West) indicated that they would not proactively inhibit any changes to the Civic Center. If and when design changes are contemplated, as the keepers of many of Frank Lloyd Wright's original plans and drawings, they could provide assistance as consulting architects
- The Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy, located in Chicago, is an organization dedicated to the preservation of Frank Lloyd Wright buildings. It proactively intercedes in situations where such buildings are likely to be demolished

## **Input from County and Local Staff**

The Grand Jury asked interviewees to provide their impression of current Civic Center security, augmented with specific thoughts for security enhancements. In general, the comments received by the Grand Jury were consistent with the thoughts and conclusions of the BOS and Sheriff as they responded to the Recommendations of the prior Grand Jury.

The following is a list of possible enhancements that were suggested over the course of the interviews:

- Remove obstacles (e.g., boxes of papers) in certain stairwells. These could cause a fire hazard as stairwells can turn into "chimneys" in case of fire
- Employ "police security officers" (i.e., non-sworn employees whose levels of training and compensation are below those of police officers or sheriff deputies) who could be a cost-effective solution for staffing security functions at the Civic Center
- Use color-coded IDs, in lieu of name badges, as an alternate way for security staff to identify Civic Center personnel
- Control the entryways with metal detectors
- Prevent parking under the archways
- Secure balcony doors that are readily accessible
- Make security more visible in the halls
- Move the Courts to another building, one built with the security of the Courts in mind. This would augment security at the Civic Center, as the Courts are believed to be a primary focus of one form of risk, the violent individual
- Move the library to another location, as it would allow the Civic Center to be closed during off-hours. Presently, a portion of the Civic Center is open at off-hours to allow access to the library. Moving the library out of the Civic Center is a topic of discussion

## **Building a New Courthouse**

A number of interviewees stated that moving the courts to another venue would reduce risk at the Civic Center. The courts attract more individuals who could potentially create an incident as compared to the administrative divisions of the County government.

A statewide study to prioritize capital outlays for courts in all 58 California counties has placed building a new court facility in Marin County in the middle of the priority list (79 out of 201 projects). The study considered both benefits (i.e., what would be gained) and needs (i.e., what shortfalls could be remedied). The project in Marin County scored fairly low in the needs area.

When asked to comment on the low score regarding needs, Marin representatives suggested that the special need for security was inappropriately low. Other factors considered in determining needs included physical condition, prisoner's safety, functional condition, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, deficient courtrooms, and space shortfall. Apparently, in these regards, the court facilities in Marin do compare favorably to other court facilities around the state.

Another important point is that implementation of the project is several years off, and is contingent upon the actual funding of the project by the state. The projected new courthouse is to be built on the Civic Center campus, replacing a building that would be razed. The Grand

Jury saw no mention of aesthetic considerations, which is very important in this Frank Lloyd Wright-designed facility.

## FINDINGS

- F1. The Civic Center is a building complex with unique design features. Moreover, many elements of its design are antithetical to changes that would be more than superficial.
- F2. Substantial design changes for the sake of security have, in many cases, been viewed as being prohibitively expensive.
- F3. There is a distinct disinclination to make design changes that would compromise the aesthetics and ease of access to the building.
- F4. The Conservancy, which has operated to oversee design changes, has not stopped implementation of changes, but has suggested modifications for the sake of the building's aesthetics.
- F5. Although the Civic Center has been found lacking in some levels of security that are viewed as essential with respect to terrorism, there is no indication that the Civic Center is high on any terrorism list. In fact, it is a common view that the Civic Center ranks low on the list of terrorist targets.
- F6. The Civic Center has been making consistent improvements in security, including taking a number of proactive steps to deal with natural emergencies. Nevertheless, there still are areas that could use improvement.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. The County of Marin should continue its process of improving the level of security at the Civic Center. The focus should not be limited to incidents involving violent individuals, but should include natural disasters as well.
- R2. Specific enhancements that require immediate attention are removing the obstacles in stairwells and securing balcony doors that are readily accessible.
- R3. Security enhancements in progress that need to be expedited are key card access systems and new camera installation.
- R4. Create a source of visible security by adding "police security officers" (i.e., non-sworn employees whose level of training and compensation is below those of police officers or sheriff deputies).

## REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal code section 933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses as follows:

- Marin County BOS to all Findings and Recommendations
- Sheriff to R4