

**CITY OF ST. HELENS PLANNING DEPARTMENT
STAFF REPORT
HRR.1.23**

DATE: December 4, 2023
TO: Planning Commission acting as the **Historic Landmarks Commission**
FROM: Jennifer Dimsho, AICP, Associate Planner

APPLICANT: SOLARC Architecture, c/o Nate Carter
OWNER: Columbia County

ZONING: Riverfront District, RD, Plaza Subdistrict
LOCATION: 230 Strand Street (the old Columbia County Courthouse); 4N1W-3BA-7600
PROPOSAL: Seismic upgrade, platform railing replacement, and ceiling and column repairs to the historic County Courthouse clocktower and reinforcements to the existing exterior fire escape

SITE INFORMATION

Site Description: The historic Columbia County Courthouse is owned by Columbia County and is the first building listed in the National Register of Historic Places for the St. Helens Downtown Historic District (1984). It is listed as a Secondary Significant structure, having been built after the fire of 1904, but before 1933. In 1972, a non-compatible, non-contributing courthouse was added to the north end elevation of the original 1906 Columbia County Courthouse. The historic courthouse is also listed as a designated landmark in our local historic resource list, which is why this alteration is being reviewed with a public hearing.

The old courthouse is a two-story structure sitting on an above-grade basement. The building itself is constructed with random coursed basalt with the window lintels and sills a light gray sandstone. In 1984, the nomination notes a clocktower which is centered on the top of the roof with a square base of metal which is painted white. "Four square columns topped with a classical entablature and steeply pitched hipped roof with steep gable projections facing in four directions. Each gable end has a clock face in it."

Proposal: The applicant is proposing the following modifications to the **clocktower**:

- **Seismic improvement.** The applicant notes that the structural elements that will strengthen the bell tower will be located within the envelope of the bell tower, columns, and attic and will not be visible.
- **Railing replacement.** The applicant is proposing to remove the existing metal clocktower platform railing which is not historically accurate. They propose to replace it with a "mixture of wood for the rail and a composite material for the balustrades" on all four sides. All painted white.

- **Platform ceiling.** The applicant indicates the existing clocktower platform ceiling has deteriorated. They will be replacing the ceiling and soffit panels with modern materials (“most likely fiber cement panels”) with the same reveals and trim painted white.
- **Platform columns.** The applicant indicates removal of the existing sheet metal column surrounds to be replaced with new column surrounds, bases, and caps with modern materials (“most likely fiber cement panels”) with the same trim and painted white.
- **Fascia panels.** The applicant notes minor repairs and painting of fascia panels on the clocktower platform and ceiling. They also note removal of a steel angle edge on the platform.

The applicant provided an egress diagram which dictates the need for a secondary egress route. It is not currently safe to use because of deteriorated stone windowsills where the fire escape was attached. The applicant is proposing the following modifications to the **fire escape**:

- **Hardware.** New fire escape hardware including new steel brackets bolted to the basalt stone (instead of the windowsills). All new fire escape components are proposed to be painted black to match the rest of the existing fire escape.
- **Windowsill replacement.** Two stone windowsills where the stone has been degraded from the fire escape hardware will be replaced in-kind.

PUBLIC HEARING & NOTICE

Hearing dates are as follows:

December 12, 2023 before the Planning Commission

Notice of this proposal was sent to surrounding property owners within 300 feet of the subject property on November 22, 2023, via first class mail. Notice was sent to agencies by mail or e-mail on the same date. Notice was published in the The Chronicle on November 29, 2023.

The 120-day rule (ORS 227.178) for final action for this land use decision is **February 22, 2024**.

AGENCY REFERRALS & COMMENTS

As of the date of this staff report, no relevant agency comments have been received.

APPLICABLE CRITERIA, ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

SHMC 17.36.040(3) CRITERIA FOR ALTERATION

In order to approve an application for the alteration of a designated landmark or historic resource of statewide significance, the commission must find that the proposal meets the following standards:

- (a) The purpose of the historic overlay district as set forth in SHMC 17.36.005.

- (b) The provisions of the comprehensive plan.
- (c) A property shall be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.
- (d) The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal or relocation of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property shall be avoided.
- (e) A property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, shall not be undertaken.
- (f) Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
- (g) Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.
- (h) Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible (including environmental considerations), materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.
- (i) Chemical and physical treatments, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used.
- (j) Archeological resources shall be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
- (k) New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible in appearance with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.
- (l) New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

(a) The purpose of this Chapter is noted under Section 17.36.005. As it relates to this proposal, the purpose of this chapter is to accomplish the protection, enhancement, and perpetuation of improvements that represent or reflect elements of the city's cultural, social, economic, political, and architectural history. The Commission can find that this review is intended to safeguard the city's historic heritage as embodied in the district and its resources.

(b) The Comprehensive Plan includes a policy to "subject proposed remodeling of the City's historic resources to design review to encourage preservation of the structure's historical assets." The Commission can find that this is the review of an alteration to a City historic resource, so this is met.

(c) The Commission can find that these alterations will not change the historic use of the building as a courthouse.

(d) There will be no removal of distinct materials that characterize the building. Replacement of the non-historic clocktower metal railing with railing that more closely resembles the historic photos satisfies this criterion. In addition, the clocktower columns will have sheet metal removed

and replaced with surrounds, bases, and caps which more closely match the panel detail in historic photos.

(e) The Commission can find that elements from other buildings have not been added to this building to create a false sense of historic development.

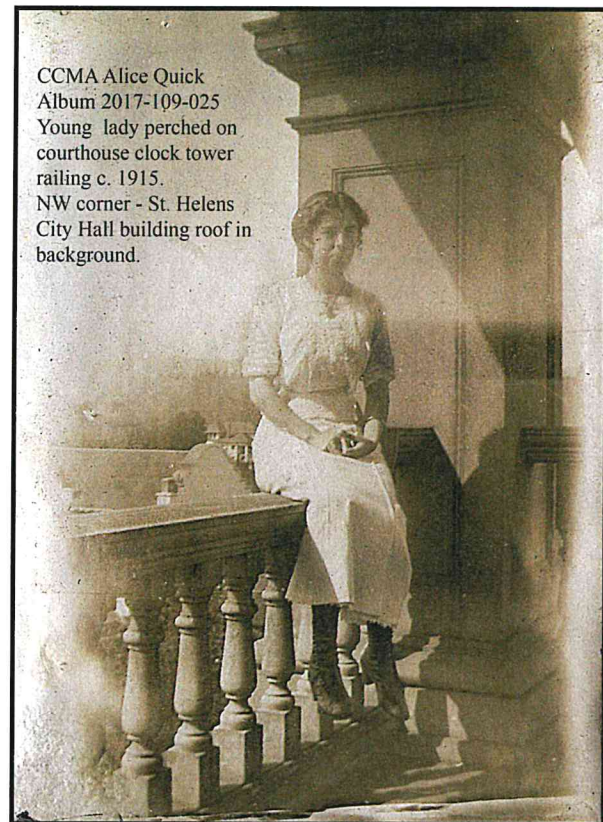
(f) The Commission can find there are no alterations to the building which have acquired their own historic significance and should be retained.

(g) This criterion focuses on distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques. Both the clocktower railing and columns will result in features and finishes which more closely resemble the original structure. The applicant also notes minor fascia repairs which are proposed to be painted white to match. The applicant is proposing modern materials to replace materials which have deteriorated beyond repair. This is addressed in more detail under (h) below.

If the Commission can find criterion (h) is met for replacement of deteriorated historic features with modern materials, the Commission can also find that the materials being replaced do not characterize the property, as long as they can still match the old in design, color, and texture.

(h) The applicant notes several historic features which have deteriorated beyond repair, including the clocktower ceiling and column surrounds, bases, and caps. Wherever replacement is proposed, this criterion requires that the new features must match the old in design, color, texture, and where possible, materials. Because of lifespan considerations, the applicant is proposing a different material, “most likely fiber cement panels.” While not in the application, the location on the river also creates environmental considerations for replacement materials. Does the Commission feel the lifespan considerations and environmental considerations warrant replacement of deteriorated materials with modern materials? At a minimum, the Commission should consider a condition that the new materials used for the clocktower platform ceiling and column surrounds, bases, and caps should match the old in design, color, and texture. This should include the same reveals and trim.

This criterion also requires that where a missing feature is being replaced, evidence is supplied. For the railing, there are many photos provided which show the proposed style of railing on all four sides. An additional photo is provided to the right. Also note that the existing columns no longer include the paneling detail because they have been wrapped in incompatible sheet metal



which is proposed to be removed with the detail re-added. There is evidence of this missing detail provided.

Another historic feature which has deteriorated beyond repair are the two windowsills on the south elevation where the fire escape was installed previously. The applicant is proposing to replace these two stone windowsills “in-kind.” Presumably, this satisfies this condition. However, staff notes it may be very difficult to perfectly match the old in design, color, and texture. **The Commission could consider requiring that the County receive staff approval of the stone to confirm that it is “in-kind replacement” prior to installation.**

(i) This is not relevant to this proposal.

(j) This is not relevant to this proposal.

(k) Removal of the incompatible metal railing on the clocktower and replacement with railing which more closely resembles the original railing in appearance and location satisfies this condition. It appears that even if the railing materials are wood and composite, they will be compatible with the historic photos of the clocktower if done correctly.

The fire escape is not original, but the applicant provided an egress study which shows a secondary emergency egress is needed for the safety and function of the courtroom. **The Commission should assess if the hardware drilled into the basalt stones and/or mortar will cause damage to the south stone wall over time. Staff is concerned that without sufficient detail provided in the application about the method of installation, something similar to what occurred to the windowsills could occur to the south wall stones and/or mortar.**

(l) For this criterion to be met, **the Commission must assess the integrity of the historic structure if the fire escape were to be removed in the future. The south wall stones and mortar may be jeopardized if the fire escape is installed in a way that does not minimize damage upon future removal. Staff feels there is not currently not sufficient evidence in the applicant’s package to make a finding for this criterion. The Commission could consider requesting additional information about how the installation methods will minimize damage to the historic stones upon removal.**

Finding: These criteria are met as presented by the applicant.

SHMC 17.36.040(4)

(4) Prior to alteration, current photographs and/or drawings of all elevations shall be provided to the city for its public records. Photographs and drawings shall be archival quality; proof of such shall be provided with the photographs and/or drawings.

Finding: Current photos have been included in the digital record for this HRR.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Depending on the discussion of the fire escape and information provided during the public hearing, the Commission has a few options described:

- **Option A:** Continue the public hearing to the January 9, 2024, meeting so that the applicant can provide additional materials to help meet the criteria addressed in criteria (k) and (l). Note that the 120-day rule (ORS 227.178) requires final action for this land use decision by February 22, 2024.
- **Option B:** Approve **only the alterations related to the clocktower**, basing the denial of the fire escape modifications on findings under criteria (k) and (l).
- **Option C:** Approve the application as outlined below with findings and an additional condition which the Commission feels will meet the criteria addressed in (k) and (l).
- **Option D:** Any other option that the Commission comes up with.

Please note that the requirements of other City of St. Helens departments (e.g., Building, Engineering, and Administration) and other agencies (local, state and/or federal) may apply to this proposal. This **local land use approval** decision does not exempt and is not a substitute for those requirements.

Based upon the facts and findings herein, if the Historic Landmarks Commission approves this **Historic Resource Review**, staff recommends the following conditions of approval:

1. As included in this HRR submittal, the new materials used for the clocktower railing, clocktower column surrounds, bases, and caps, and the clocktower ceiling should match the original in design, color, and texture. This includes the same reveals and trim.
2. The replacement stone for the two south wall windowsills shall be approved by the City prior to installation to confirm that it is “replacement in-kind.”
3. << **Option B:** Only improvements related to the clocktower and clocktower platform are approved. No alterations related to the fire escape are approved with this HRR. >>

OR

<< **Option C:** A new condition which helps address criteria (k) and (l) for the fire escape installation could be included here. >>

Attachments: *Applicant’s Narrative (5 pages)*
Applicant Attachment A – Many Faces of the Courthouse Clock (2 pages)
Applicant Attachment B – Site Plan (1 page)
Applicant Attachment C – Elevations (5 pages)
Applicant Attachment D- Existing Deterioration Photos (3 pages)
Applicant Attachment E – Egress Study (1 page)

October 2023

Columbia County Courthouse

Historic Resource Review Narrative

City of St. Helens

Prepared on Behalf of:
Columbia County
230 Strand Street
St. Helens, Oregon 97051

Prepared for:
City of St. Helens
Planning Department
265 Strand Street
St. Helens, Oregon 97051

Prepared by:
SOLARC Architecture
3115 NE Sandy Boulevard, Suite 224
Portland, Oregon 97232

Property Information

Owner:	Columbia County, State of Oregon
Site Address:	230 Strand Street St. Helens, Oregon 97051
Taxlot No.:	4106-BA-07600
Parcel No.:	00616266
Zone:	RD (Riverfront District)
Overlay District:	St. Helens Downtown Historic District (Secondary Significant, Designated Landmark)
Subarea:	Plaza Subdistrict
Lot Size:	Approx. 2.37 Acre (103,040 SF)
Building Size:	Old Courthouse: 17,943 SF Courthouse Annex: 42,637 SF
Project Description:	Seismic upgrade to the existing bell tower and exterior fire escape; along with the replacement of the bell tower platform railing. Scope of work includes construction of new seismic bracing interior to the bell tower attic, columns, and courthouse attic.

Narrative

PURPOSE

The purpose of this project is to seismically strengthen the bell tower and the existing fire escape of the original courthouse in downtown St. Helens. This will serve to prolong the life of the bell tower and provide a safe and functioning fire escape.

PROVISIONS OF COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The proposed project serves to prolong the life of a major feature (bell tower) of a designated landmark without impacting the goals and policies of the comprehensive plan in regard to the Public Lands zone.

HISTORICAL USE

We are not proposing to change the historical use of the property.

HISTORICAL CHARACTER

This project lends itself to the opportunity to change the bell tower's railing to better match the original railing from 1906 and re-store the platform ceiling to its original condition. Historical photos are attached to this narrative for reference. The structural elements that will strengthen the bell tower will all be located within the envelope of the bell tower, columns, and courthouse attic. They will not be visible from the exterior.

Additionally, we understand that the fire escape is not original to the courthouse, however, it is necessary to maintain a secondary emergency egress route. The fire escape is currently attached to the stone window sills at the platforms. Those sills have, over time, deteriorated to a point of needing replacement and have created an unsafe fire escape. The window sills will be replaced in-kind and the additional elements that will reinforce the fire escape will have a minimal visual impact.

PHYSICAL RECORD OF TIME, PLACE, & USE

We are proposing to restore the bell tower railing, columns, and deteriorated platform ceiling back to its original character. We are proposing to use modern materials (most likely fiber cement panels) for the columns wraps and ceiling that will have the same reveals and trim as in 1906 but will have a much longer life span than traditional wood panels. The new railing is proposed to be a mixture of wood for the rail and a composite material for the balustrades. All components are proposed to be painted white to match the historic photos and existing conditions.

The proposed changes to the fire escape will be minimal and necessary for a safe functioning fire escape. The new elements will be painted black to match the rest of the fire escape.

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

We understand the historical significance of the courthouse and we are proposing structural upgrades that will extend the life of the bell tower for many years. As stated earlier, this upgrade will not be visible from the exterior, and this project lends itself to bringing the bell tower columns, railing, and platform ceiling back to its original character with modern materials. We are purposing to restore the bell tower platform to be historically accurate to the best of our knowledge.

DISTINCTIVE MATERIALS, FEATURES, FINISHES, AND CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES

We are proposing a change to bring the bell tower railing, columns, and platform ceiling back to its original profile but will use modern materials painted white.

RESTORATION OF DETERIORATED FEATURES

The bell tower platform has deteriorated over time due to weather. The proposed project provides an opportunity to replace the platform columns, railing, and ceiling. We are proposing to replace these elements with modern materials and restore their original character.

The existing stone window sills associated with the fire escape have deteriorated, as well, and need replacement to prevent water intrusion through cracks. We are, also, proposing to add steel elements to the fire escape to avoid attaching the fire escape to the window sills; this will serve to prevent future damage from weather cycling.

CHEMICAL AND PHYSICAL TREATMENTS

We are not proposing any chemical or physical treatments that would cause damage to historical materials.

ARCHEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

This project does not impact any archeological resources of this property.

EXTERIOR ALTERATION

The proposed alterations will not destroy historic materials, features, or spatial relationships that characterize the property. While we are proposing to include modern materials, they will be selected and implemented to restore the bell tower character rather than detract or continue to detract from the original courthouse.

The added elements to the fire escape will allow the fire escape to be safe and properly function if the need to use it arises. The visual impact of these new elements will be very minimal and will not impact other features of the courthouse.

IMPACT TO HISTORICAL INTEGRITY AND ESSENTIAL FORM

We believe that the proposed bell tower project will have a positive effect on the courthouse by restoring the original character of the bell tower platform.

The fire escape upgrade will be minimal and will not impact the historical integrity or essential form of the courthouse.

Attachments

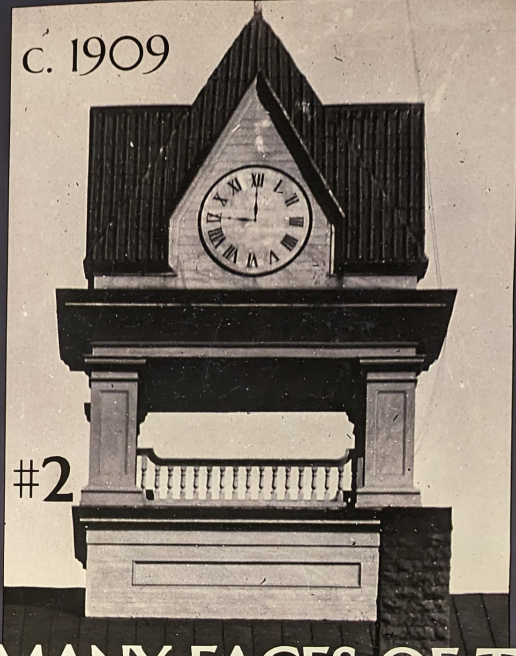
Attachment A – Historic Photos of Bell Tower

Attachment B – Site Plan

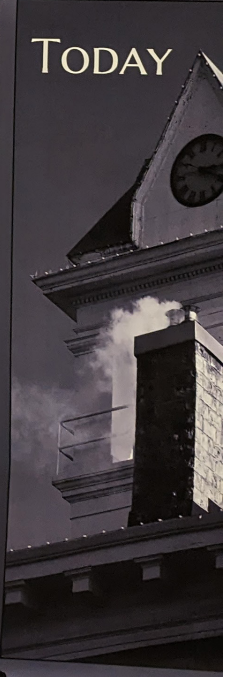
Attachment C – Architectural Plans

Attachment D – Photos

Attachment E – Egress Study



THE MANY FACES OF THE COL





1911

#3



1925

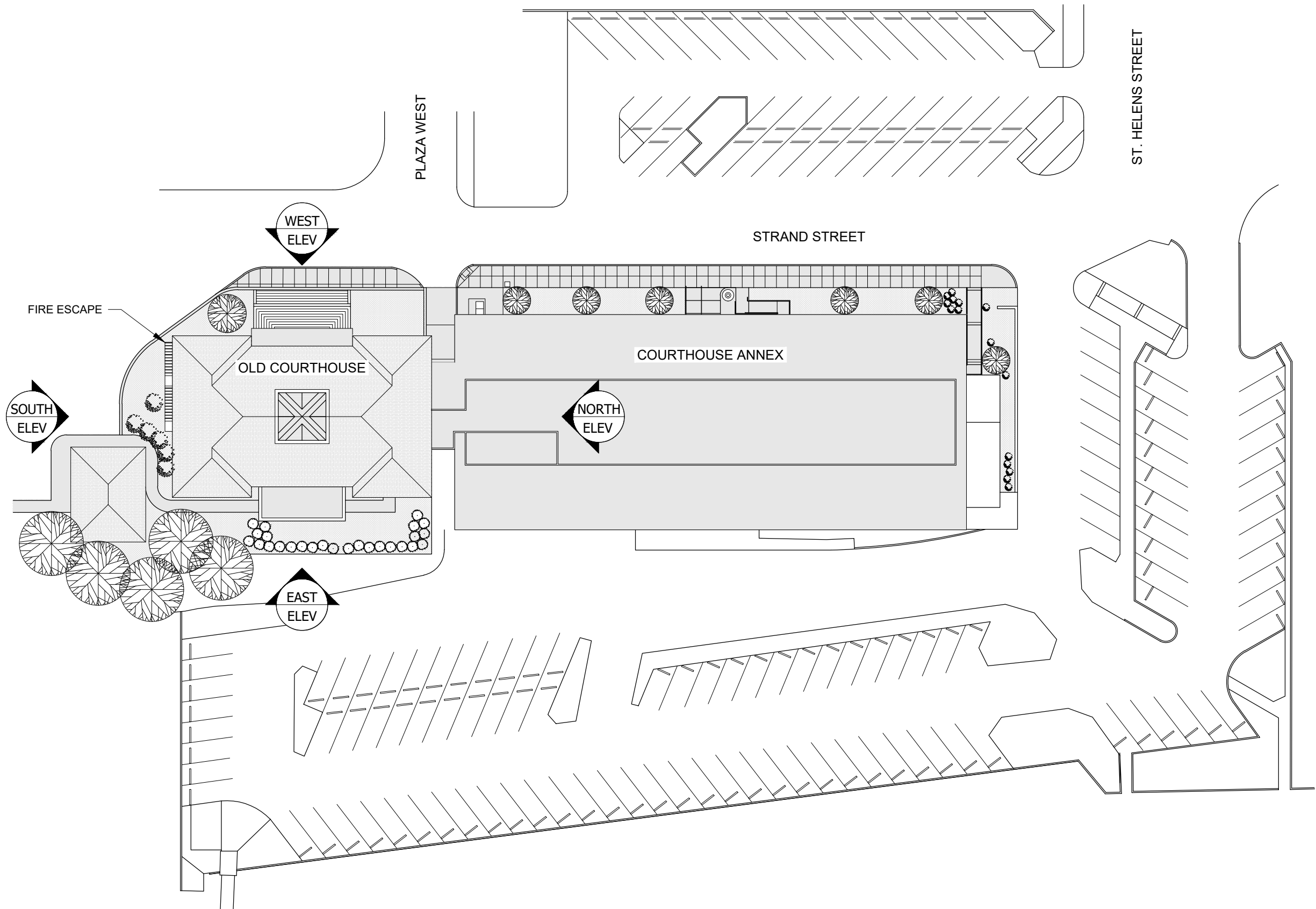
#4

PHASES OF THE COURTHOUSE CLOCK



TODAY

- #1 & 2 FAKE FACE THAT ALWAYS READ 9:00 O'CLOCK.
- #3 AFTER SETH THOMAS CLOCK INSTALLED. NOTE SPLIT BEZEL.
- #4 BEZEL PAINTED WHITE AND JOINED.
- #5 TEXTURED ROOF REPLACED WITH WHITE METAL, RAILING AND FLAG POLE REMOVED, COLUMNS AND BASE CLAD WITH FLAT METAL SHEETS COVERING MOLDING AND PANEL DETAILS.
- #6 PERIMETER IRON RAILING ADDED, ROOF COLOR DARKER.



SITE PLAN
 SCALE: 1" = 40'-0"



HISTORIC RESOURCE REVIEW

PROJECT #: 23-009

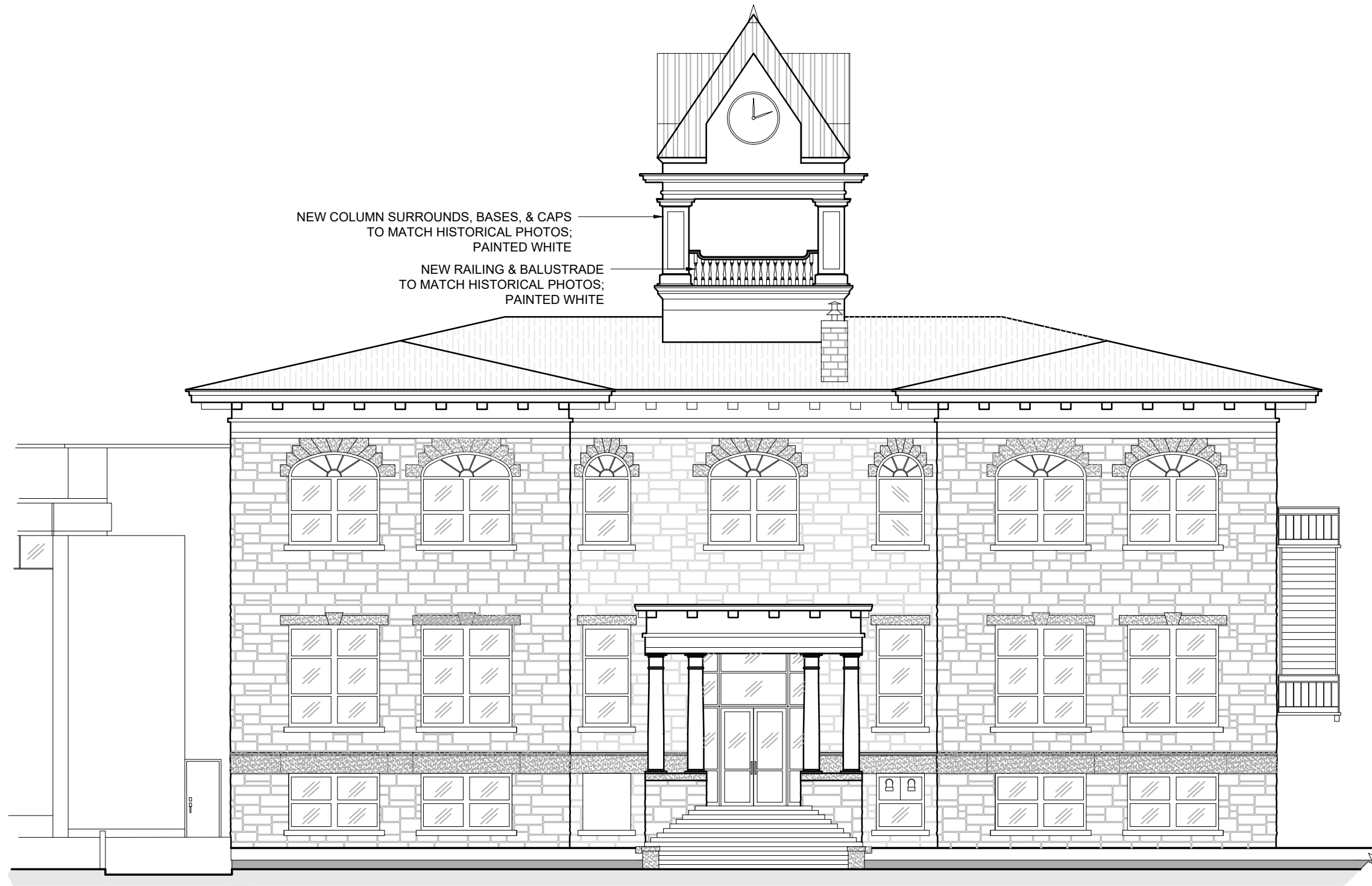
20 - OCTOBER - 2023

FULL SIZE PRINT = 11 x 17

**COLUMBIA COUNTY COURTHOUSE
 BELL TOWER SEISMIC UPGRADE**
 ST. HELENS, OREGON

**SOLARC
 ARCHITECTURE**
 3115 NE Sandy Boulevard, Suite 224
 Portland, Oregon 97232
 971.344.1919
 www.SOLARCarchitecture.com

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WEST ELEVATION (STREET VIEW)

SCALE: 3/32" = 1'-0"

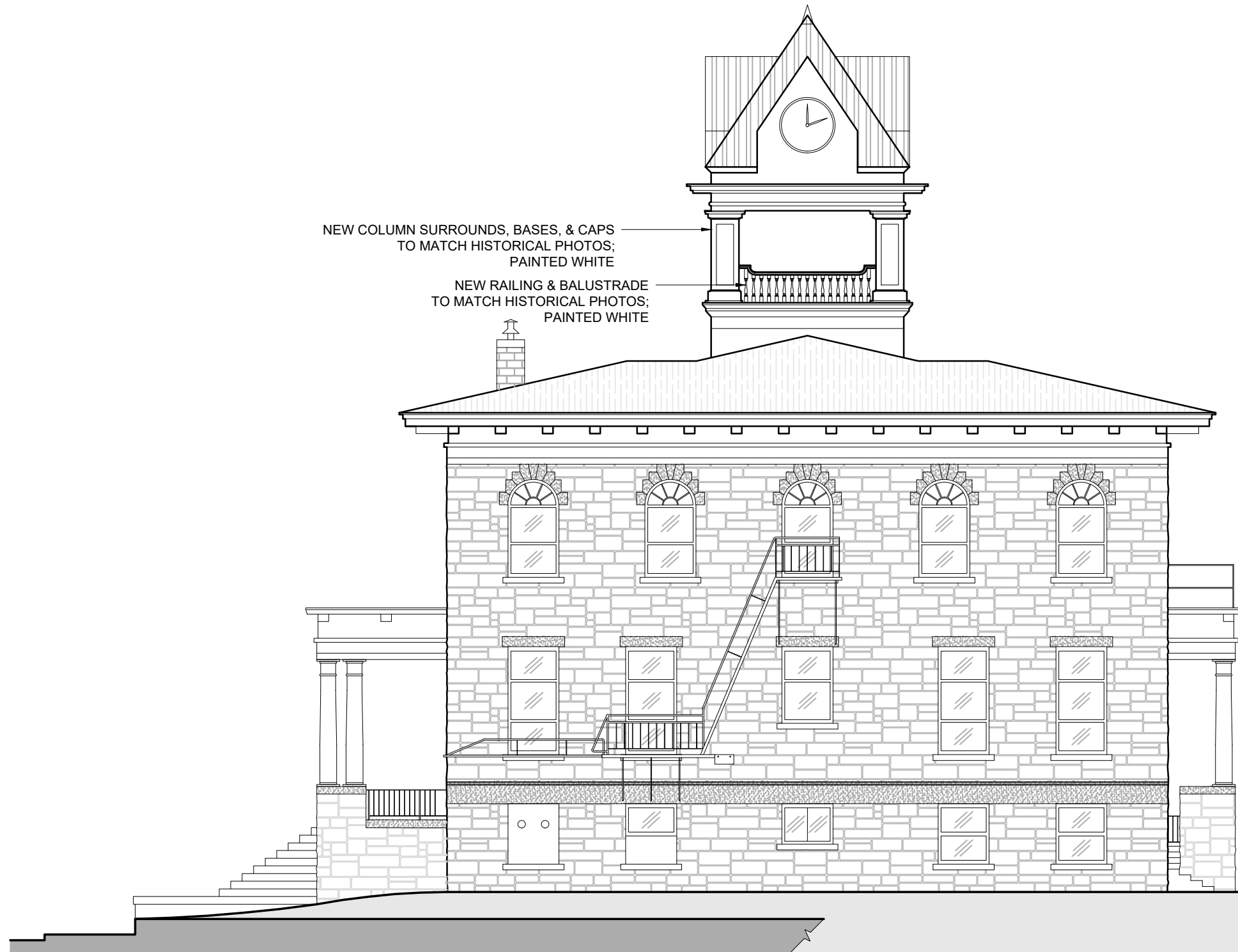
HISTORIC RESOURCE REVIEW

PROJECT #: 23-009

20 - OCTOBER - 2023

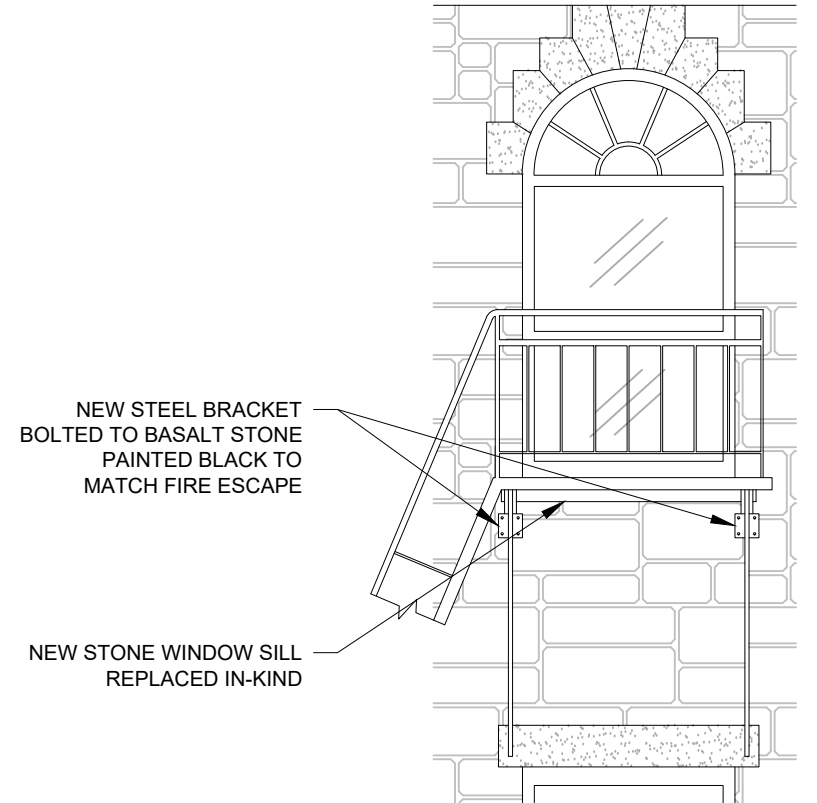
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COLUMBIA COUNTY COURTHOUSE
BELL TOWER SEISMIC UPGRADE
ST. HELENS, OREGON



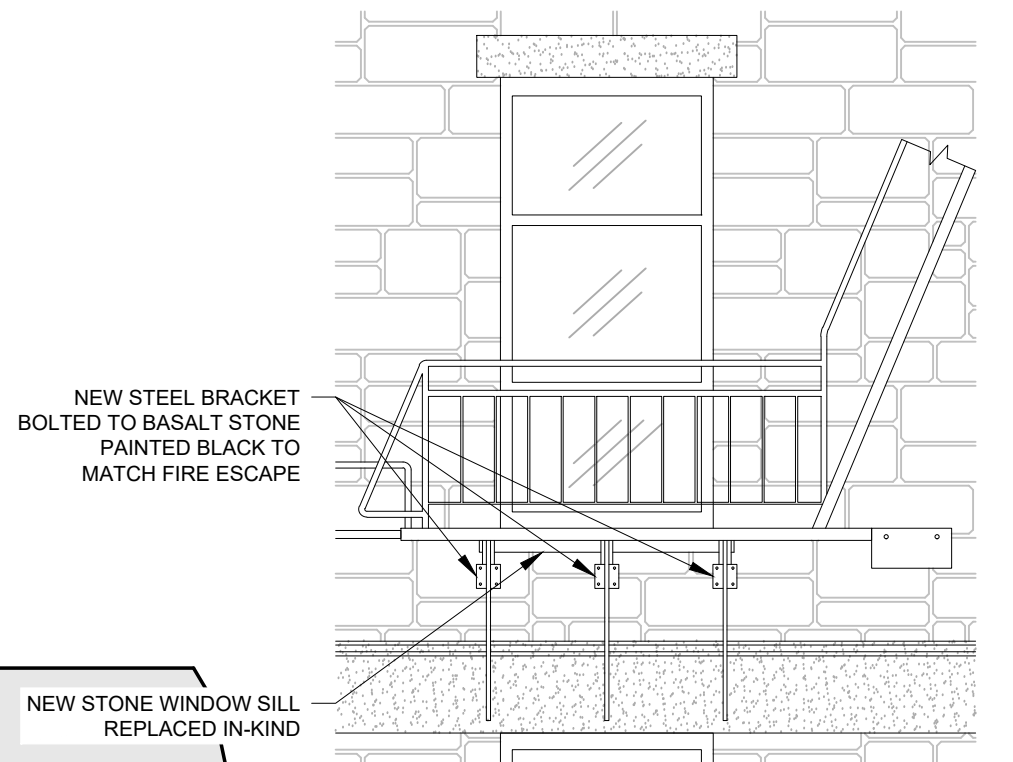
SOUTH ELEVATION

SCALE: $\frac{3}{32}$ " = 1'-0"



NEW STEEL BRACKET
BOLTED TO BASALT STONE
PAINTED BLACK TO
MATCH FIRE ESCAPE

NEW STONE WINDOW SILL
REPLACED IN-KIND



NEW STEEL BRACKET
BOLTED TO BASALT STONE
PAINTED BLACK TO
MATCH FIRE ESCAPE

NEW STONE WINDOW SILL
REPLACED IN-KIND

FIRE ESCAPE PLATFORMS

SCALE: $\frac{1}{4}$ " = 1'-0"



EAST ELEVATION (RIVER VIEW)

SCALE: $\frac{3}{32}$ " = 1'-0"

HISTORIC RESOURCE REVIEW

PROJECT #: 23-009

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www.SOLARCarchitecture.com

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NEW COLUMN SURROUNDS, BASES, & CAPS
TO MATCH HISTORICAL PHOTOS;
PAINTED WHITE

NEW RAILING & BALUSTRADE
TO MATCH HISTORICAL PHOTOS;
PAINTED WHITE

NORTH ELEVATION

SCALE: 3/32" = 1'-0"

HISTORIC RESOURCE REVIEW

PROJECT #: 23-009

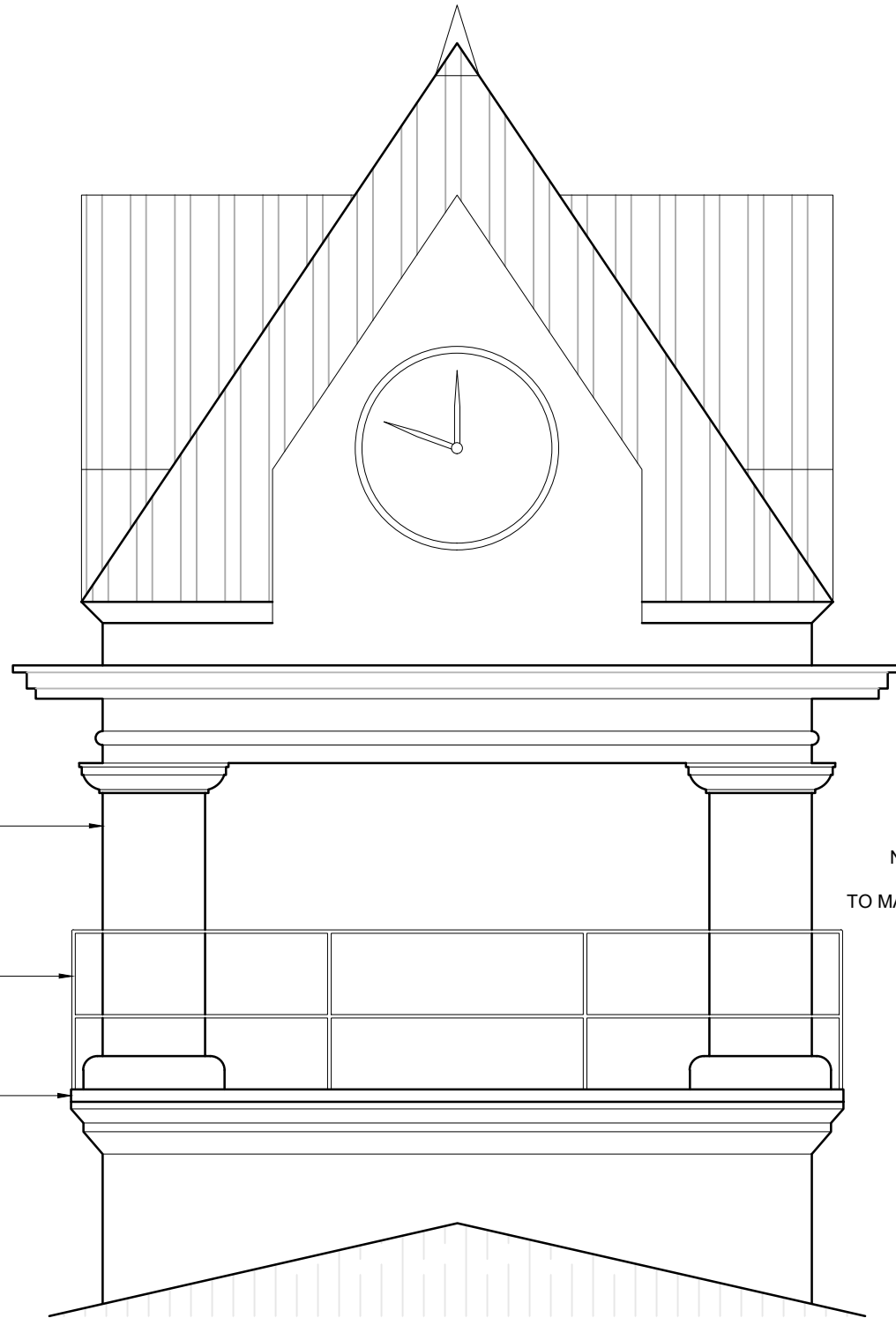
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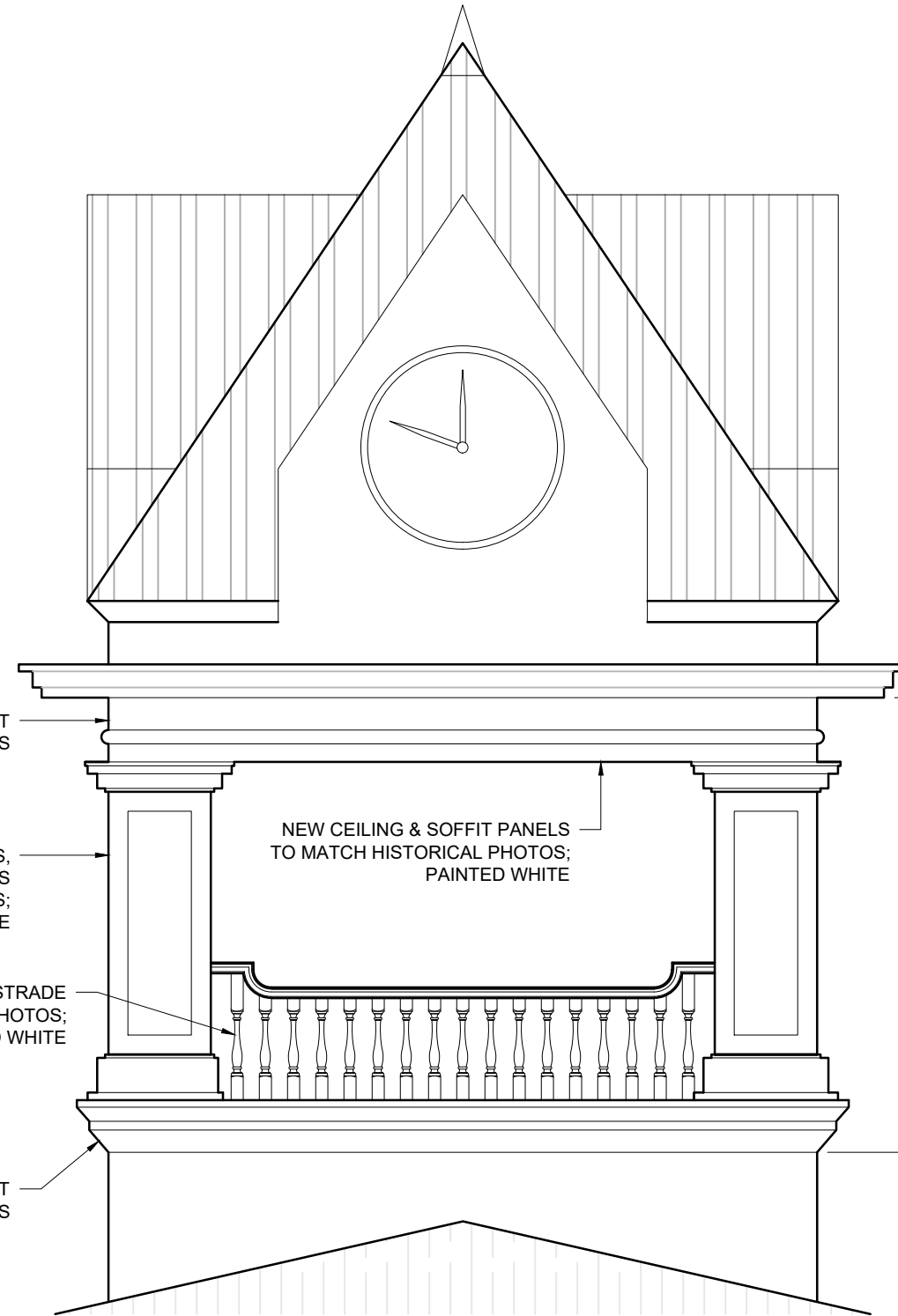
EXISTING SHEET METAL
COLUMN SURROUNDS
TO BE REMOVED

EXISTING STEEL PIPE RAILING
TO BE REMOVED

EXISTING STEEL ANGLE EDGE
TO BE REMOVED

EXISTING BELL TOWER ELEVATION

SCALE: $\frac{3}{32}$ " = 1'-0"



MINOR REPAIR & PAINT
TO FASCIA PANELS

NEW COLUMN SURROUNDS,
BASES, & CAPS
TO MATCH HISTORICAL PHOTOS;
PAINTED WHITE

NEW RAILING & BALUSTRADE
TO MATCH HISTORICAL PHOTOS;
PAINTED WHITE

MINOR REPAIR & PAINT
TO FASCIA PANELS

NEW CEILING & SOFFIT PANELS
TO MATCH HISTORICAL PHOTOS;
PAINTED WHITE

LIMIT OF RESTORATION

NEW BELL TOWER ELEVATION

SCALE: $\frac{3}{32}$ " = 1'-0"

**COLUMBIA COUNTY COURTHOUSE
BELL TOWER SEISMIC UPGRADE
ST. HELENS, OREGON**

PHOTOS OF THE DETERIORATED WINDOW SILLS ASSOCIATED WITH THE FIRE ESCAPE

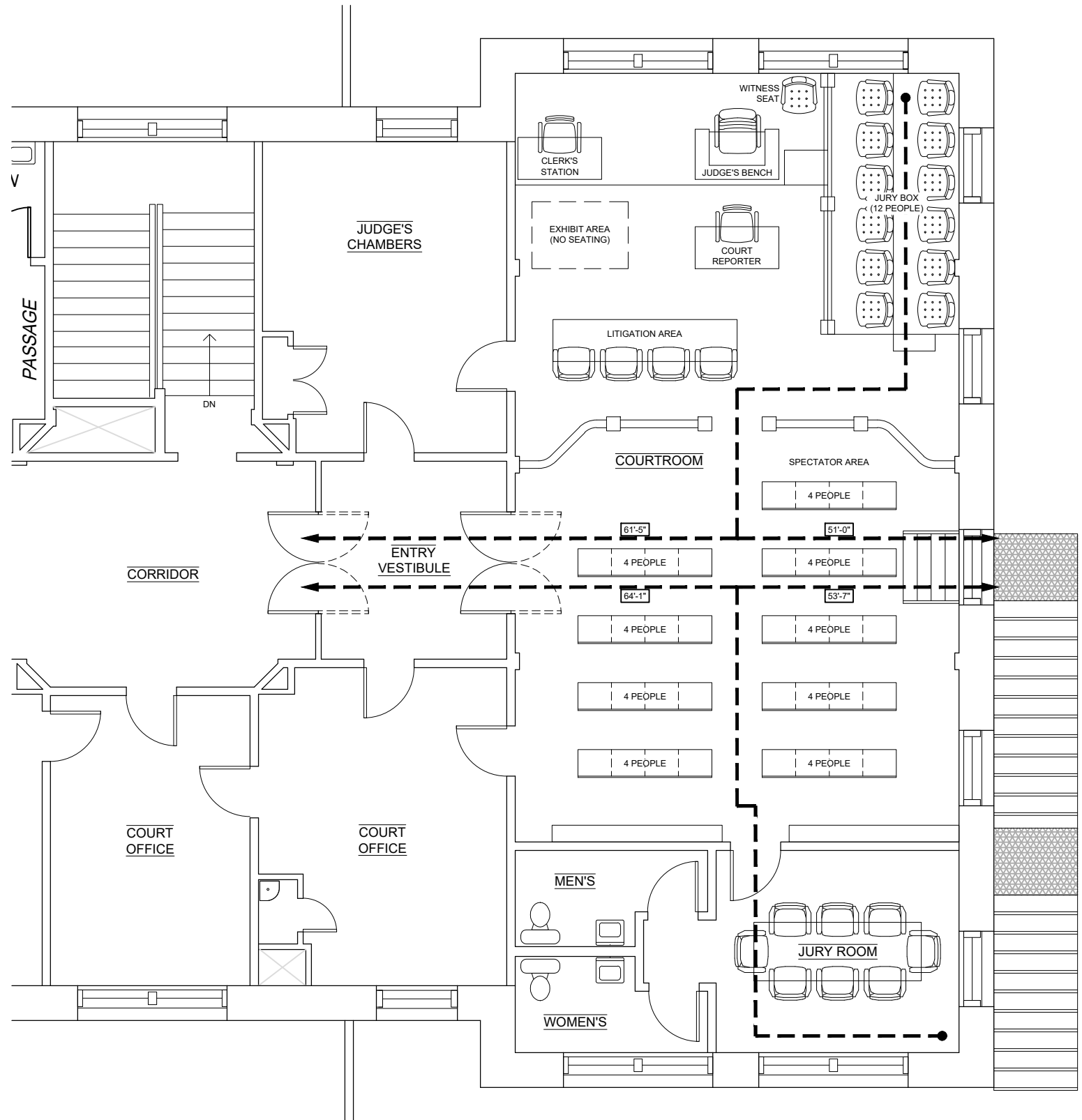


PHOTOS OF THE DETERIORATED BELL TOWER CEILING



PHOTOS OF THE DETERIORATED BELL TOWER COLUMNS & RAILING





CURRENT COURTROOM LAYOUT

EGRESS STUDY

IN ORDER TO REMOVE THE EXTERNAL FIRE ESCAPE THE COURTROOM WILL NEED TO COMPLY WITH THE BUILDING CODE FOR A SINGLE EGRESS SPACE. THIS WILL REQUIRE THE SPACE TO HAVE AN OCCUPANT LOAD OF 49 PEOPLE OR LESS AND THE SINGLE POINT OF EGRESS WITH A COMMON PATH OF TRAVEL OF 75'-0" OR LESS.

FOR CALCULATING THE OCCUPANY LOAD THIS SPACE CAN FOLLOW THE FIXED SEATING METHOD INSTEAD OF THE SQUARE FOOTAGE METHOD, BECAUSE THE SPECTATOR AREA PEWS ARE FIXED TO THE FLOOR AND THE COURT AREAS (JUDGE'S BENCH, JURY BOX, ETC...) ARE SPECIFIC DESIGNATED AREAS.

BUILDING CODE ANALYSIS

2022 OREGON STRUCTURAL SPECIALTY CODE

CHAPTER 10: MEANS OF EGRESS

1004.6 FIXED SEATING

FOR AREAS HAVING FIXED SEATING, THE OCCUPANT LOAD SHALL BE DETERMINED BY THE NUMBER OF FIXED SEATING. THE OCCUPANT LOAD FOR AREAS IN WHICH FIXED SEATING IS NOT INSTALLED SHALL BE DETERMINED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE FLOOR AREA CALCULATION METHOD (SECTION 1004.5) AND ADDED TO THE NUMBER OF FIXED SEATS.

FOR AREAS HAVING FIXED SEATING WITHOUT DIVIDING ARMS, THE OCCUPANT LOAD SHALL BE NOT LESS THAN THE NUMBER OF SEATS BASED ON ONE PERSON FOR EACH 18 INCHES OF SEATING LENGTH.

1006.2.1 SPACES WITH ONE EXIT OR EXIT ACCESS DOORWAY

OCCUPANCY	MAX OCC LOAD OF SPACE	MAXIMUM COMMON PATH OF TRAVEL
ASSEMBLY	49 OCCUPANTS	75'-0" (WITH SPRINKLER SYSTEM)

CURRENT COURTROOM FIXED SEATING

JURY BOX:	12
WITNESS SEAT:	1
JUDGE'S BENCH:	1
COURT REPORTER:	1
CLERK STATION:	1
LITIGATION AREA:	4
SPECTATOR AREA:	36
TOTAL:	56 (OVER THE 49 OCCUPANT LOAD)

JURY ROOM IS EXCLUDED FROM THE COUNT ABOVE AS THE JURORS ARE ACCOUNTED FOR WITH THE JURY BOX.

COMMON PATH OF TRAVEL

64'-1" OR LESS (UNDER THE MAXIMUM DISTANCE)