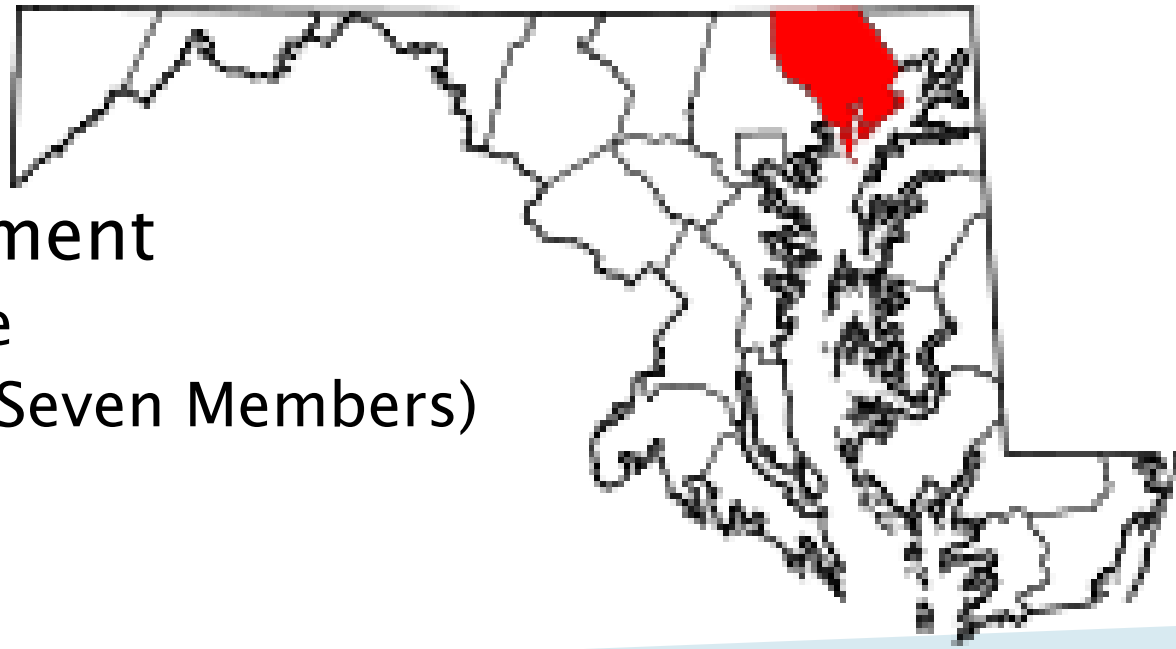
Losing a Building: Carrying on the Business of Government

Robert S. McCord, County Attorney
HARFORD COUNTY, MARYLAND
IMLA Chicago – September 2011

Harford County, Maryland

- Top of the Chesapeake Bay, NE of Baltimore
- PA border, I-95
- Pop. 250,000
- Charter Government
  - County Executive
  - County Council (Seven Members)
  - 1200 Employees



212 South Bond Street



- Built in 1985
- Purchased 1996
- Home to 75 employees
  - County Council
  - Cultural Arts Board
  - Department of Public Works
    - Office of the Director, Bonding and Permits, Traffic Engineering, Division of Water and Sewer

Happy New Year

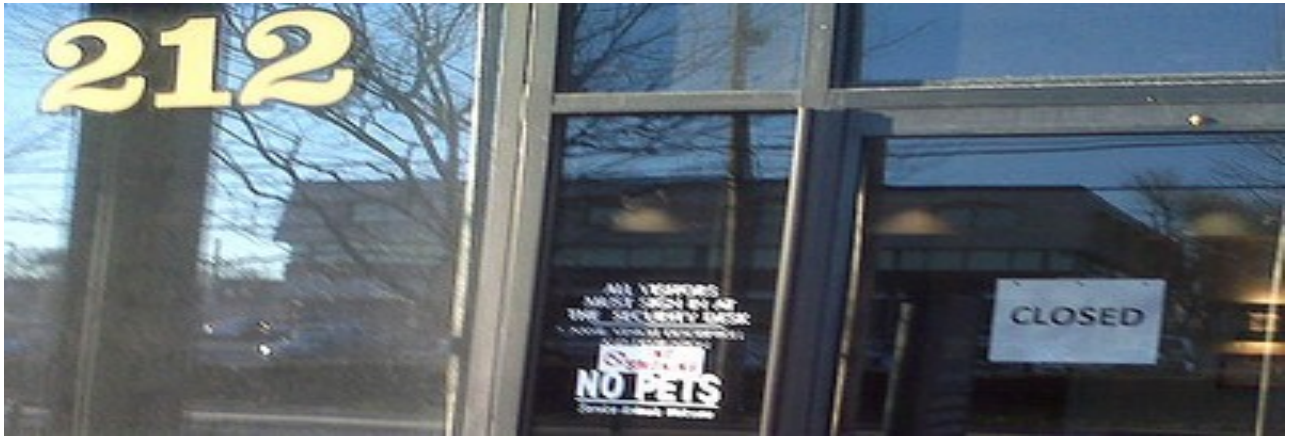


- “The creep is apparently causing progressive dislocations which can result in failure with little warning. Such failure can initiate as cascading truss bending failure with downward rupture and folding of the floor slab, and collapse onto the floor slab beneath, which if unsupported by ground would also be halted by the ground. **I consider the structural stability of the building to be unsafe for occupancy.**”
- *****CRITICAL INTERIM REPORT *****12/30/10

Decision Point

- No one will occupy the building until it is declared safe.
- Cannot be declared safe until after extensive evaluation (including destructive testing).

- ALL EMPLOYEES MUST BE RELOCATED 1/3/11



Triage Based on Function

- Legislative Branch has first priority
  - Relocation and functionality restored ASAP
    - Pending legislation will die if no action taken.
    - Public hearings must occur after intro and ad.
    - Public sessions must have
      - Public Seating
      - Local Cable Access
  - Office space, conference space, parking space.
  - Access to files and records.



Council's New Digs

- Board of Education Hearing Room.
  - Dias, Public Seating, wired for TV, wireless available.
- Former Child Advocacy Center
  - Few blocks away from old space and temp space.
  - All staff (13 total) can be accommodated.
  - Wired and connectivity available.
  - Conference room available.
  - Elevator and secure lobby.
  - Files can be relocated.



Triage Based on Function

- DPW workgroups to be preserved if possible.
  - Permits with permits (DILP/DPW).
  - Traffic together.
  - Water and Sewer together.
  - Director requires secretary and conference space.
  - Customer service considerations.
    - Avoid multiple stops for approvals.
    - Keep related reviewers together.

DPW Becomes Embedded

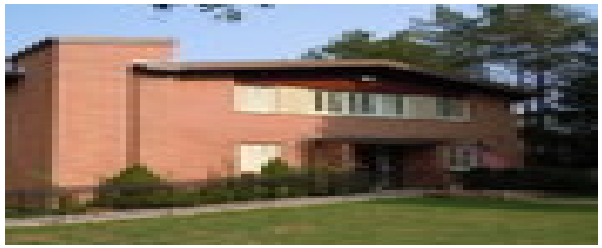
- Director to Department of Law
  - Confidential secretary, conference room space.
- Bonding and Permits to DILP
  - Same floor with Inspections, Licenses and Permits.
- Traffic Engineering to Highways
  - Engineers with the road folks.
- Water & Sewer to Emergency Operations
  - Temporary solution.

Water and Sewer Special Case

- W&S Engineering and Administration
  - Best to keep groups together (17 in one group).
  - Intense IT load.
    - Large drawings and printers.
    - GIS and other specialized applications.
  - BRAC contractors requiring quick turn around.
  - EOC not available in case of emergency (snow).

Water & Sewer Prayers Answered

- Relocated to Office on Aging (former convent).
- Office on Aging employees dispersed to Senior Center sites.
- Data Link established through private school.
  - Low voltage microwave.
  - Line of sight to County Data Center.
  - Rooftop antenna /receivers installed in one day.
  - Rooftop license took more than one day.
  - Model for other remote data links.



Cultural Arts Bd. Gets Infamous Home

- National Register of Historic Places
- Initials carved in glass – “JWB”.
- Built by famous actor father.
- Southern sympathizer would become more famous for leaping onto stage shouting Latin motto of the Commonwealth of Virginia, where he died.
- Home is known as “Tudor Hall”.



Inventory of All Available Space

- Compile list of every office and every workstation currently available in every county owned facility.
  - More than two dozen locations.
  - Consider telephone and IT availability.
  - Consider short term, long term and interim locations.
  - Prevent domino relocations if possible.

Report to Work Day Plan

- Establish central report to work location.
- Inform of all known details/Control rumors.
- Assign new work locations.
- Require employee work plans.
- Review departmental COOP plans.
- Prepare list of work requirements
  - Accessories, files, data access, projects pending.

Establish IT Connections

- Make IT a priority.
- Make data links new address phone numbers available and updated constantly.
- Prepare for interim and long term IT solutions.
- Manage intense use of available bandwidth.
  - Schedule intense applications for off peak times.
  - Consider off line and CD based tasks.

Other Considerations

- Avoid turf wars.
- Continue to provide updates to employees
  - Status of building.
  - Manage expectations.
- Update COOP plan with lessons learned.
- Encourage flexible schedules.
- Continue to reward good citizen service.

PEOPLE FIRST

- Employee safety primary concern.
  - Restrict access to building.
    - Five at a time.
    - Sign in, sign out.
- Citizen service remains job one.
  - Tools needed to accomplish the job.
- Avoid interdepartmental friction.

Legal Considerations

- Keep Risk Management involved.
- Keep Insurance carrier apprised.
  - Preserve evidence.
  - Document expenses.
- Use ER procurement process sparingly for
  - Selecting engineers, movers, and others.
  - Securing rental space, if necessary.
- Resist temptation for quick answers.
  - Engineering problems are complex.
  - Public safety demands detailed evaluations.

Legal Considerations (continued)

- Consider warranty claims.
- Consider claims against any firms who gave prior engineering analysis.
- Consider natural causes that may have contributed to structural failure.
  - Rare east coast earthquake.
  - Rare back to back blizzards.
- Interview witnesses and document timing of reports of evidence of structural issues.

Legal Considerations (continued)

- Draft agreements for space and IT support.
  - Leases, licenses, including software licenses

The Rest of the Story

- Comprehensive engineering analysis shows that the building is now safe for occupancy.
  - County Council prefers new home.
  - Plans for orderly re-occupation now underway.