

**State Bar of Arizona Task Force on Persons With Disabilities
Accessibility Committee Site Visit
City of Gilbert Justice and Municipal Court Facility
Phoenix, Arizona**

SURVEY BACKGROUND

Facility: City of Gilbert Justice and Municipal Court, 55 E. Civic Center Drive, Gilbert, Arizona 85296

Date: April 16, 2004

Team: James B. Reed (Jaburg & Wilk, P.C.) (team leader); Ed Myers, Esq. (Northern Arizona University), Hugh Gallagher, Maricopa County Administrative Department.

Court Personnel: Judy Richitelli, Court Clerk's Office/Administration/Services; Hon. David Phares.



Overview

This facility is a Municipal and Justice Court complex for the City of Gilbert, Arizona. It is a relatively new structure, and was state of the art in its accommodations for persons with disabilities. The physical accommodations of the court complex were among the best observed in this statewide survey. The team did not observe any significant access-related issues for persons with disabilities. Court administrators and personnel are aware of issues pertaining to access for persons with disabilities. Specific observations follow.

Parking

Parking is extensive and sufficient. Sufficient accessible parking spaces exist, with proper signage and cut curbs to the entry sidewalk.

Entrances and Exits, Including Evacuations

The main entryway is fully accessible. The entryway is very wide, and has considerable turnaround area for wheelchair users, along with extensive space to bypass security. The entryway has an automatic door opener button that is clearly marked and operated without incident. The distance between the door and the button is approximately ten feet, which is an appropriate distance to use the automated doors without rushing. The entry area is tile, which is very effective for persons using wheelchairs, but presents some risk for persons using canes or crutches. The entryway/security area is very large, with considerable area for alternate entry for “wandering” persons using wheelchairs.



As with the entry, there was no problem with the exit. Interior exits were well lit. The stairwells are identified in universal signage, as both a stairwell and a Fire Exit, with Braille signage.



Pamphlet and Informational Services

There is no pamphlet currently available describing services for persons with disabilities; however, at the entryway, there is a large blue electronic screen, with information about the court, with an information window on the other side of the screen.

Evacuation plans are prominently posted on each floor for easy use and reference.

Restrooms

The team surveyed a representative sampling of restrooms in the courthouse, with emphasis on the main floor restrooms. All restrooms seemed accessible with no significant issues or concerns noted. The doors had slight tension, and were push doors opening inward. The difficulty with push doors opening inward is that a person using a wheelchair can more easily request help from a passerby to enter a restroom, than from a passerby when wanting to exit the restroom. The easiest form restroom door for a person using a wheelchair is a light tension, push door, opening out into the hallway. However, the configuration of the door area within the restroom did permit a wheelchair user to pull up alongside the handle and back up, dragging the door open; so for inward-opening restroom doors, this configuration was optimal.

The locations of accessible restrooms were clearly marked, with universal signage. The faucets were plunge handles, that were relatively easy to operate. The soap dispensers were on the mirror, opposite the user. This survey has commonly suggested the placement of soap dispenser on side walls, making them easier to reach, but with the dispenser still over a portion of the sink to avoid spillage of soap on the floor, which could lead to unsafe, slippery conditions.



The sinks used a wood cover over the pipes, instead of pipe wraps, sloping down and away from the sink at a 45 degree angle. While this wood cover was common in courthouses in Maricopa County, the barrier makes it difficult for a person using a wheelchair to pull close to the sink. Otherwise, the sink is at an appropriate height.

The stalls were excellent, with sufficient room to park a wheelchair inside the stall during use, and transfer out of it and back into it. The stall had sufficient grab bars, and a motion/light sensor automated flush. The restroom surveyed a low height urinal, with a dual use for persons using wheelchairs and for children.

Hallways and Lobbies

All hallways were wide. Employee hallways had ramps, with rails, including on a ground floor exit hallway. An employee hallway doorway was light tension, with no latches, and only grab bars instead.



Each floor that the team observed had a public water fountain at wheelchair height, fully functional and easy to operate. Pay telephones in the hallways were at wheelchair height.



The Clerk's counter had a section at wheelchair height with a very functional, extended counter.

The employee lunchroom and break room was generally accessible, with wing handles at the sink. The outside patio area had accessible tables, with open space at the tables for wheelchairs. The patio also operated as an effective, close proximity fire exit.



The men's locker room was fully accessible, with an accessible toilet stall and low-height urinal. One of the shower stalls had a spring bench, shower "snake," grab bars and a same level shower stall floor. The sinks in the locker room also had plunge faucet controls, but with the same wood slopes instead of pipe wraps under the sink, and soap dispensers, on the mirror, across from the sink user, instead of on the side of, but over, the sink.

Elevators

The elevator banks had Braille, completely universal signage, with an image of people in a box, with up and down arrows. There was sufficient room in the elevators for entry and mobility. The buttons were placed at appropriate heights. There is a "beep" at each floor as the elevator car arrives and the door opens. The metal casing outside each elevator had a bas relief numeral, with a star next to the "1" on the first floor, signifying the ground floor, and had Braille. The elevators had intercoms for emergency use and have rails at appropriate heights. The elevators are in all respects state of the art.



Law Library

No information.

Courtrooms

Courtrooms are located on floors one and two. The first courtroom the team viewed was **Municipal Courtroom 3**. Its exterior hallway sign was in Braille. The courtroom had three kinds of lighting: perimeter, continuous tube lighting, two large halogen, ceiling lamps, and spot lamp track lighting in the ceiling. The hallway doors into the courtroom swung open well beyond 90 degrees, which made the tension on them much more desirable than doors that reach their maximum opening at 90 degrees. The tension on the doors was reasonable, apparently somewhere between five and ten pounds. The hallway courtroom doors had a bar between the two doors for noise control, which could limit wheelchair passage space.



The passageway from the courtroom gallery for the public and the well of the courtroom did not have a swinging door, the absence of which is very beneficial to wheelchair users. The passageway appeared to be only approximately 36 inches wide. This is consistent with the width of the courtroom hallway doors.



The witness box had an easy slope, with rails, at approximately 36 inches, making for a fully accessible witness box. The witness chair was on casters and therefore could be removed to accommodate a witness using a wheelchair.



A projector screen may be lowered from behind the bench for video displays. For any juror or witness requiring hearing assistance, the court has wireless headphones. All courtrooms are rigged for hearing assistance.

A ramp also led to the jury box, with spring, movie theater style seats. There are also two castered jury chairs, which could be removed to permit inclusion of an individual using a wheelchair in the jury box.

The team then viewed **Municipal Courtroom 5**, the arraignment and traffic violations courtroom, which had a similarly accessible sign and doorway. Trials normally do not occur in this courtroom. That courtroom seemed to have a slightly wider gallery passageway, and had extensive gallery space for persons using a wheelchair. The room had similar lighting, and a ramp to a mobility-accessible witness box, as with prior courtrooms. The witness box had a castered chair and was fully accessible.

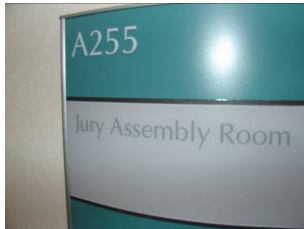
The interior courtroom doors had a push railing, and were of light-to-moderate tension. The arraignment courtroom gallery area was slightly more confined, with some, but more limited, space for wheelchair users. The jury box was ramped, with spring style seats and extensive room for a person using a wheelchair to participate.

Counsel's table was fully accessible with castered chairs. The bench wall had a screen for exhibits and assistive listening through infrared projection.

The team then visited **Justice Courtroom Number 2**. It was similar in design and very accessible. A ramp also led to the jury box, with spring, movie theater style seats and substantial room to permit a wheelchair user to participate, with two castered jury chairs. There was no gallery door into the well, and there was substantial space in the gallery to permit observation by several persons using wheelchairs.

Juror Facilities

The Jury Assembly room was clearly marked with universal, Braille signage. The assembly room was fully accessible, with closed caption TV monitors. The Assembly room had fully accessible restrooms and accessible lockers.



The team visited a municipal court jury deliberation room that appeared accessible in all material respects. The room was large, with easily removed caster chairs. The deliberation room had an accessible, unisex restroom, with universal signage and latch handles on both sides of the door. The room had interior grab bars, pipe wraps under the sink, and wing handles on the sink.



The Justice Court jury deliberation room had Braille signage. The room had a sign with accessible wing handle faucets on the sink. The jury deliberation restroom also had universal Braille signage. Inside, the restroom had full grab bars, wing handles on the faucets and heat wraps on the sink pipes.

Holding Cell

The holding cell had an accessible toilet, with grab bars.

Chambers

The team was afforded access to a representative chambers. There was ample room for any member of staff or visiting lawyer or member of the public to maneuver using a wheelchair or move with a walking device. There were no steps between the courtroom well and the chambers.



General Observations

All public signs in the building that the team observed were imprinted with Braille code.

If in fact the jury summons does not include an accommodation notice, some thought could be given to including a separate notice with the summons for that purpose.

Similarly, and consistent with any budget demands, some consideration should be given to publishing a pamphlet for members of the public or those in the legal profession with disabilities. The purpose would be along the same lines as the notice included in court subpoenas and jury summonses. The Phoenix Municipal Court has such a pamphlet available.

CONCLUSION

The City of Gilbert Municipal and Justice Courthouse, is an accessible building, both in its main areas of public use and in its courtrooms. Personnel responsible for administering the facility seemed particularly aware of and attuned to needs of persons with disabilities, and welcomed recommendations and suggestions to improve available services. Overall, its accommodations for persons with disabilities were outstanding.

