

**State Bar of Arizona Task Force on Persons With Disabilities
Accessibility Committee Site Visit
City of Phoenix Municipal Courthouse
Phoenix, Arizona**

SURVEY BACKGROUND

Facility: City of Phoenix Municipal Court, 300 W. Washington, Phoenix, Arizona 85003-2103

Date: January 30, 2004

Team: Carrie Sherman (team leader), State Bar of Arizona; James B. Reed, Gregory S. Fisher, and Christina J. Larson, Jaburg & Wilk P.C.; Scott L. Greeves, Arizona Department of Revenue; and William D. Sheldon, State Compensation Fund.

Court Personnel: Jim Scorza, Court Administrator, and Linda Minton-Altiveros, Executive Assistant.



Overview

This facility is a new municipal courthouse that is state-of-the-art in all respects, including disability accommodation. 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, and were very enthusiastic about our review. The team had one participant who used a wheelchair. Specific observations follow.

Parking

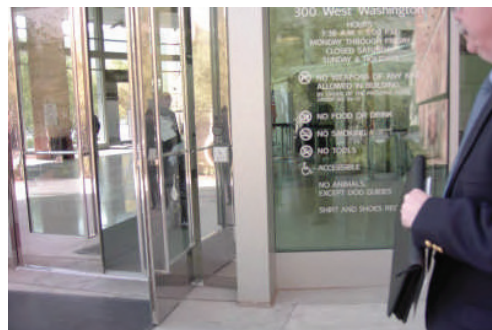
Parking is extensive and sufficient, but is located across the street. Within that parking structure, large accessible parking spaces exist, and are clearly marked and are presumed ADA-compliant for a city structure. There are appropriate cut curbs to the entry sidewalk.

Entrances and Exits

The facility faces south, with the main entrance and main parking on that side. The entryway had an incline pathway that was slightly challenging for manual wheelchair use.



There was an automatic door opener button, but the position of the button required maneuvering around the door after pressing it because the door opened out (toward the individual). The timing of the automatic door opening and entry required more time than was available after pressing the button. Manual doors were somewhat heavy.





Suggestions: As it would most likely be cost prohibitive to alter the door to swing open away from the individual and into the courthouse, we suggest moving the position of the button and increasing the length of time the door remains open.

The security area is very wide open, permitting bypass for “wandering” of persons using wheelchairs, walkers or crutches. The entry area is tiled, which is helpful for persons using wheelchairs, but presents some risk for persons using crutches or canes. The security officers can provide/lend out wheelchairs to those visitors to the courthouse who ask for such assistance.

A side, employee entrance was fully ramped and accessible, with automatic, push button doors.



The railings on the ramp were at an appropriate height for a person using a wheelchair or with other mobility challenges to use.



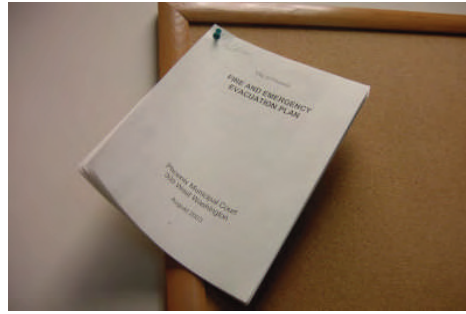
Suggestion: At the employees' exit just inside the building, the "push to open" button appears high. Repositioning the button and moving a table which was positioned there would make this exit more accessible.

Security/Evacuation

The main floor fire alarm lever was set at a low height for wheelchair users. There were prominently displayed overhead signs stating "Area of Rescue Assistance" designating points of refuge during evacuations.



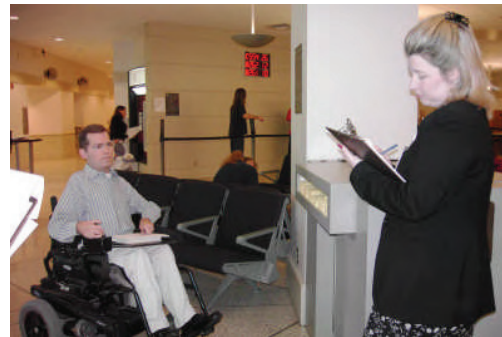
The main lobby sign menu included directions to a point of refuge. During an emergency, members of the public can gather at the top of the stairwells in each stairwell and on every floor. The staff inform the fire department personnel as to where persons with disabilities are in the stairwell. Evacuation plans are prominently posted on each floor.



Jurors are informed of evacuation procedures.

Court Administration

The Clerk's counter had low counter heights that were accessible to persons using a wheelchair. However, the payment kiosks and/or payment boxes were challenging for a person with limited upper body mobility to use, or height limitations, as the slot was located at the top of the kiosk.



Suggestion: If security factors would not be breached, moving the “payment slot” from the top to the front of the kiosk would alleviate an individual’s reach.

Pamphlet and Informational Services

There is an extensive selection of pamphlets available, in both English and Spanish as well as in large print, describing services of the courthouse for members of the public, including for persons with disabilities. Interpreters provide their services to court defendants in over 44 languages and dialects. The informational display was prominent and extremely helpful.

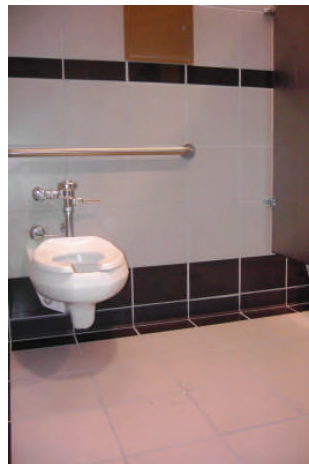


Restrooms

The team surveyed a representative sampling of restrooms in the courthouse, with an emphasis on the main floor restrooms. All restrooms seemed accessible with no significant issues or concerns noted. Proper signage with Braille and universal wheelchair indication were prevalent throughout the facility, particularly outside the restrooms. The restroom doors had accessible latch or “wing” handles, with some tension resistance that could pose a challenge for persons using a wheelchair.



Each restroom had a fully accessible stall. The stall surveyed had full grab bars, and sufficient room in the stall to both transfer out of a wheelchair, and turn around in it, and keep it in the stall during use.



The sinks are excellent, with pipe wraps, but with the faucet controls and the soap dispenser requiring an extended reach, for a person using a wheelchair. The faucet has a push valve at the top of the faucet head, which is quite usable. The length of the sink was over ten feet, leaving considerable room for a person with mobility impairments to operate at the sink.

The men’s restrooms had a low height urinal for individuals using a wheelchair.

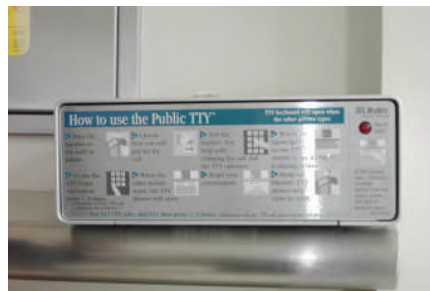
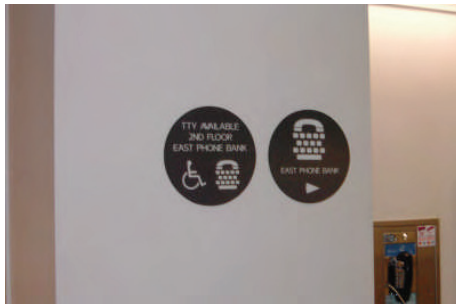
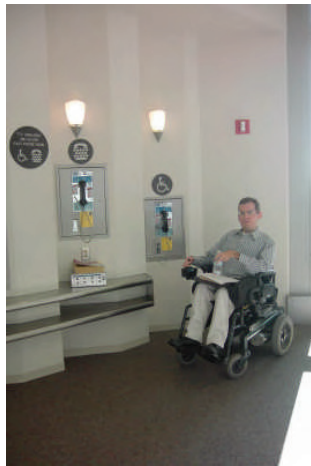
Hallways and Lobbies

All hallways were wide. A hallway information window had a low-height counter.

Each floor that the team observed had a water fountain at wheelchair height, with an easy-to-use, front push button. All were functional. Again, Braille signs appeared throughout the building.



Braille, universal signage gave directions to a telephone that had TTY capacity. Pay telephones were clearly marked, with universal signage over each set of pay telephones. At each pay telephone bank, one of the phones was placed at a height for a person using a wheelchair.



There was a free public phone, with outside lines, available for all members of the public, but with an accessibility sign above it. There were other public access, free phones in the building at low height for a person using a wheelchair.



Again, where there were pay phones that did not have TTY capacity, a sign directed users to TTY phones the second floor pay telephone bank.

A heart defibrillator was prominently displayed on a lower level hallway wall.



Cafeteria

The team visited the cafeteria, which was accessible and possessed sufficiently wide passage and turn areas in both the food purchase and dining areas. The entry doors were accessible, with latch handles, and appear normally open. The kitchen appliances were low, with accessible counters, permitting a wheelchair to be wheeled up close to the appliance. A coffee machine in the middle of a passage was a slight impediment to a person using a wheelchair.





Elevators

The public elevator shaft had sufficient room in the elevators for entry and mobility. The buttons were placed at appropriate heights, with a grab rail on the walls at mid-level. There is a "beep" at each floor as the elevator car arrives and the door opens.



However, at an elevator bank in the interior of the building at the employee entrance, trash receptacles were located under the call button for the elevator, and hindered access by persons using a wheelchair.



Suggestion: Redirect the cleaning or maintenance personnel to station the receptacles away from elevator call buttons and doors.

Law Library

No information available.

Courtrooms

Courtrooms are located on several floors. The courtrooms are identified with metal accessibility signage, including instructions to the public that proceedings are recorded electronically.



Interestingly, the team observed an attorney using a wheelchair in one of the courtrooms. He believed that the courthouse was generally accessible, but that the slope up to the main entrance was difficult to travel. There do not appear to be any simple answers to that issue.



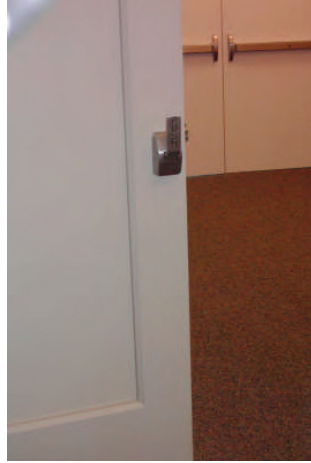
In the first courtroom visited, the jury box had an interesting, built-in ramp, which required assistance to open up for a person using a wheelchair to access the box. It was low cost, but it did require the assistance of someone other than the person using the wheelchair to gain access. The entryway into the jury box was wide enough for a team member using a standard size motorized wheelchair to enter, and the grade of slope was quite reasonable.



Once inside the jury box, there was sufficient room for a person using a wheelchair to turn around and fully participate in trial proceedings. The clerk/bailiff desk was also accessible via a fold-down ramp. These ramps, innovative and constructed at a reasonable cost, were the highlights of this facility with regard to accessibility.



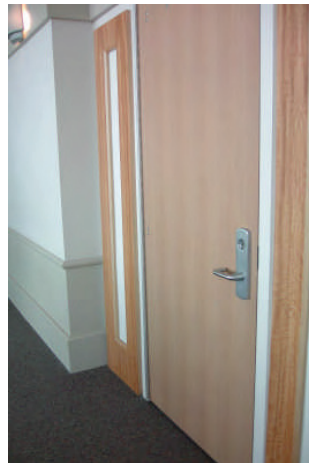
Immediately outside the courtroom, but before re-entering the hallway, there is a Braille-identified conference room, which was generally accessible. The door had accessible latch handles.



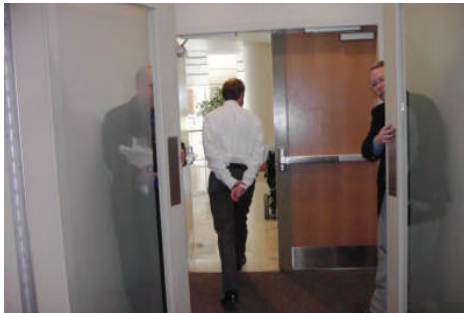
Uniquely, the courthouse had both “push handles” and “push bars” or “crash bars” throughout the facility. One of the courtrooms was specifically designed for a judge with a mobility disability, and had an operational lift to the bench.



The courtroom doors were single doors, with an accessible latch handle, of somewhat strong tension. The doors would present some level of challenge to a person using a wheelchair.

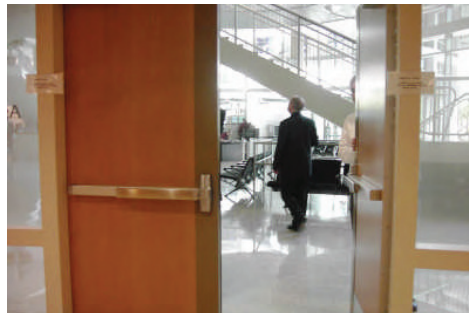


In the second courtroom visited, there was an open passageway from the gallery to the courtroom well, with a passageway that was fairly wide. The gallery area had sufficient space for several individuals using a wheelchair to observe court proceedings. The interior set of entry doors for the courtroom were glass paned push doors, with light tension and no lock bolts.



Juror Facilities

The jury assembly room is on the first floor and is entirely accessible if the doors are open. Otherwise, the entry doors to the assembly room have a slightly high tension and are challenging to use. They have crash bars for exit out into the lobby, which are generally preferable for persons using a wheelchair. There is no middle post between the entry doors, again, which is good.





There is easy access for a person using a wheelchair and also for any other device used to assist mobility within the assembly room. There are television monitors inside the jury assembly room, which are used, in part, for informational purposes. It was believed, but not confirmed, that the monitors all had close caption capacity.



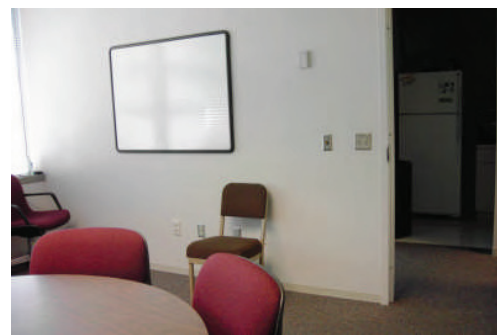
Jurors are provided with keyed storage lockers and some were installed at low heights with special handles. Several rollup workstations were located at the back of the room.



Suggestion: The sinks in the restrooms of the Jury Center appeared higher than those off the main lobby. To make these restrooms even more accessible, the sinks could be moved forward and the soap dispensers could be repositioned on the wall toward the front edge of the sink. An accessible restroom sign in the lobby of the Jury Center would also be informative and helpful to visitors.



The jury deliberation room that the team visited was accessible, with wing handles on the interior bathroom door and accessible signage. The bathroom had heat wraps on the pipes and a soap dispenser optimally placed to the side of the sink. The toilet was fully accessible, with surrounding grab bars. The deliberation table was one that a wheelchair could move around relatively easily.





The Jury Center included a separate reading room. The door closed quickly and was heavy, but a minor readjustment to the door tension would alleviate this issue.



Chambers

No information available.

Signage

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

General Observations

Court Facility staff might benefit from more discussion concerning potential requests for access to a fully electronic courtroom by a party to a criminal or civil suit, where the party's disability may make use of a fully electronic courtroom more beneficial to the presentation of his or her case, but the assigned judge does not ordinarily use one.

CONCLUSION

The Phoenix Municipal Courthouse is an excellent example of state-of-the-art, accessible design, both in the main areas of public use and in its courtrooms. Personnel responsible for administering the facility seemed appreciative of the needs of individuals with disabilities. The innovative ramps available in the courtrooms is just such an example.

