

Historic Harrisburg Association

P.O. Box 1843 • Harrisburg, PA 17105-1843
717.233.4646 Fax: 717.233.0635

Historic Harrisburg Association is dismayed by the GSA's selection of the two short-listed sites for the new Federal Courthouse. It would appear as though a single selection criterion overshadowed the benefit of the City of Harrisburg, and the more than half million who live, work and visit in the Commonwealth's Capital City.

Both sites – Second & Locust and Third & Pine Streets – will tear the urban fabric of downtown Harrisburg. Federal Courthouses historically have been located downtown. However, the newly adopted security requirements for federal buildings make it undesirable to integrate a new large courthouse building into dense, historic, urban cityscapes such as downtown Harrisburg. Security setbacks will isolate the building from its neighbors, creating a physical gap in the building density, and disrupting a vibrant downtown.

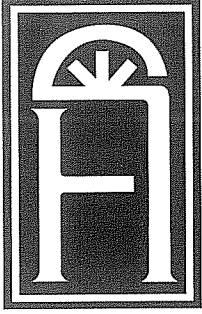
The prospect of a signature building for our city's skyline does not justify the demolition of historic and architecturally significant buildings that house businesses and residences that contribute to the character and identity of downtown Harrisburg. The economic loss of these tax-contributing buildings and businesses will only increase the burden on the taxpayer. Perhaps most perplexing is that of the ten prospective sites, the GSA selected two sites in the same densely populated area that the existing courthouse is supposed to vacate for security reasons.

Historic Harrisburg Association is in contact with stakeholders to build a unified opposition of concerned citizens to engage our city, state and federal representatives and dissuade the GSA from pursuing either site announced on June 21st. We will continue to advocate for the site at Sixth and Reily Streets, which best exemplifies GSA criteria by offering adequate setbacks and space for future growth, does not displace any existing businesses and service organizations that fuel the region's economy, does not remove any historical structures, is outside of the 100-year floodplain, and is endorsed by Mayor Reed and the community.

HHA believes that the only obstacle to this site is its location outside the central business district, but we urge the GSA to question old ideas of downtowns and whether they should remain confined to a few, traditionally defined blocks.

Construction of a courthouse at Sixth and Reily Streets would take advantage of an ongoing development trend in Midtown. Forward-thinking developers from the Harrisburg area and elsewhere have already recognized Midtown's potential, and Harrisburg Magazine recently cited Midtown as one of the hottest neighborhoods in the entire region. Infrastructure improvements are rolling out to support a wide range of business, residential, and cultural activity:

- The Broad Street Farmer's Market, which has served as a business incubator, now houses myriad locally owned restaurants and businesses offering traditional and ethnic cuisine and locally produced grocer goods.
- The new Midtown campus for Harrisburg Area Community College is scheduled to open this fall.



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- The vacant Police Athletic League Building will be restored to a Midtown landmark, as a long-sought artists' center.
- New housing construction and renovation are apparent throughout every Midtown neighborhood.
- City leaders currently solicit proposals to build student-oriented housing and ancillary services in the area.
- Hotel operators, restaurant owners and supermarkets are actively hunting for space.
- Plans will soon be implemented to recreate the Sixth and Seventh Street Corridors as the Northern Gateway to the city.

Downtowns grow. Keeping them static reflects poorly on a city's progress. Americans have made progress through the centuries by cresting the next hill, and not by saying, "We've always done it this way." We know now that the elements of a vibrant city are not contained to an arbitrary downtown. The life of a city is in the combined character of its neighborhoods. A courthouse at Sixth and Reily Streets would enhance Harrisburg's rich tapestry that now stretches from the Southern Gateway to Wildwood Park in the north, and from the riverfront rising eastward to Allison Hill. Judges, staff, jurors, and visitors at a federal courthouse at Sixth and Reily would easily find amenities – a riverfront trail, dining choices, galleries, libraries, and even gas stations.

This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. The site selection and building design/construction represent an investment of 150 million dollars by the people for a place where the people will feel safe and secure while interpreting law. It would be an injustice to construct an icon of democracy and ignore the very will of the people for whom it serves.