



NEWS RELEASE

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GUNNISON COUNTY TO DEMOLISH REMAINDER OF COURTHOUSE BUILDING Original 1881 Structure Deemed Not Structurally Sound After Partial Collapse

Gunnison County, Colorado – On Wednesday, March 19, 2014, the Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners made the decision to demolish the original courthouse structure that was built in 1881. This decision came after a partial collapse and the determination that further efforts to save the building would create safety concerns for the workers onsite. “It was with heavy hearts that we made the decision yesterday to take down the original 1881 courthouse structure. As commissioners, our two primary responsibilities are public health and safety, and fiscal responsibility. To continue in our restoration efforts of the building at this point would be both fiscally irresponsible and greatly risk the safety of many people. We are planning on using materials from the original building to recreate a structure that will be safe, sound and secure.”

Last year during the preliminary engineering phase of the project, the consulting engineers had advised the County that the original 1881 building could be saved, but many elements of the structure could not be observed until they were uncovered during the deconstruction process. Unfortunately, the building was in much worse shape than anticipated and had compromised foundations and bearing walls that made its salvage extremely difficult. “We had feared from the beginning that the building adjacent to (it) was holding up the 1881 building, and it seems that this was true,” explained GE Johnson Construction Company (the project Construction Manager/General Contractor) Superintendent Allan Arnason.

On Friday, March 14th, after removal of the previously adjacent building on the south side of the structure (done by hand because of the already fragile nature of the building) the structure began shifting due to a compromised foundation, which resulted in two masonry failures and a partial collapse of the south exterior wall. Although work on the structure has ceased due to safety concerns, the building continues to shift and, without stabilization, it will eventually collapse completely. Bob Williams of Williams Engineering, LLC was retained by GE Johnson to provide an evaluation of the building’s condition after the partial collapse, which he summarized as, “The existing 1881 building structure, in its present condition, is structurally unstable and any stabilization efforts, in or adjacent to the building, which utilize standard and accepted industry work procedures are not safe and present a serious life safety issue to workmen. In my opinion it is not practical, safe or cost effective to stabilize and repair the existing structure.”

In addition to placing workers in jeopardy, the contractor estimates that any further stabilization efforts could impact the overall budget by as much as \$300,000, add months to the project’s timeline, and create quality issues with new construction being vulnerable to winter weather extremes. Demolition of the structure will allow the project to proceed close to the original timeline and budget. Adding to the stabilization concerns, the building on the north side of the structure has yet to be demolished, and engineers cannot predict whether or not removal of that building would cause further structural failures.

Demolition of all remaining structures will begin on Monday, March 24th. At this time, the County is evaluating the possible utilization of some of the old materials, such as the tin ceiling tiles for the entryway, the large wooden trusses for the commissioners’ boardroom, the foundation stone for site work, and the exposed brick for either interior finishes or to create an attractive façade on the west entrance. The project’s engineering team hopes to present revised architectural options to the County for consideration within the next several days.

For more information, please contact Gunnison County Administration at (970) 641-0248.