

IS DALLAS CITY HALL INEFFICIENT AND FUNCTIONALLY OBSOLETE?



PREPARED BY THE TEN PRESIDENTS
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As architects and planners, our group has designed millions of square feet of office space. Our desire is to share our collective experience and expertise as a resource to City leaders, stakeholders, and taxpayers as we consider the future of City Hall.

In our previous position paper we addressed whether City Hall land is needed for sports and entertainment development next to the new Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center. It clearly showed that there is plenty of land for a robust sports and entertainment district without demolishing City Hall.

This paper addresses questions about the suitability of City Hall itself.

**SOME CLAIM DALLAS CITY HALL IS INEFFICIENT,
FUNCTIONALLY OBSOLETE,
INFERIOR TO COMMERCIAL OFFICE SPACE.**

IS IT, REALLY?

A study of the Dallas City Hall floorplan shows that each floor averages approximately 60,000 square feet in size. Of note, this is approximately the same size as the state-of-the-art floorplans currently being built by Goldman Sachs in the North End.

Dallas City Hall has large, column-free spaces that repeat across the length of the building. Column-free spaces are the gold-standard for efficient, flexible space.

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Perceived inefficiencies in City Hall are the result of 50 years of piecemeal renovations and reconfigurations in which pleasant open office workspaces were cordoned off into a “rabbit’s warren” of enclosed offices with little access to natural light. These ill-advised changes also created challenges of moving from one end of the building to the other for both visitors and City employees. This issue can be easily remedied with comprehensive, updated space planning.

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Our City Hall has the unique, highly functional ceremonial spaces required for City government like the Council Chambers, Flag Room, and four-acre plaza. These spaces would be difficult and costly, if not impossible to reproduce in commercial office space.

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Dallas City Hall is a single occupant building that provides far better control and security than a multi-tenant commercial building. This is especially acute in high-rise buildings where floors are served by shared elevator banks. Security challenges for large office tenants have been one reason that tenants have fled downtown.

Sophisticated users with unique needs are increasingly abandoning skyscrapers for groundscrapers – low rise buildings with large floorplates - for flexibility, security, user experience and a host of other reasons that are also applicable to Dallas City Hall. This type of building requires more land than skyscrapers, which typically means locating them outside the city center. Conversely, having a building like Dallas City Hall in the city center is a rare, and valuable asset.

Dallas City Hall has a dedicated, secure parking garage providing direct access to the building without having to go outside, cross any streets or be shared with others. This is also the gold-standard for parking – and a rare feature in the city-center.

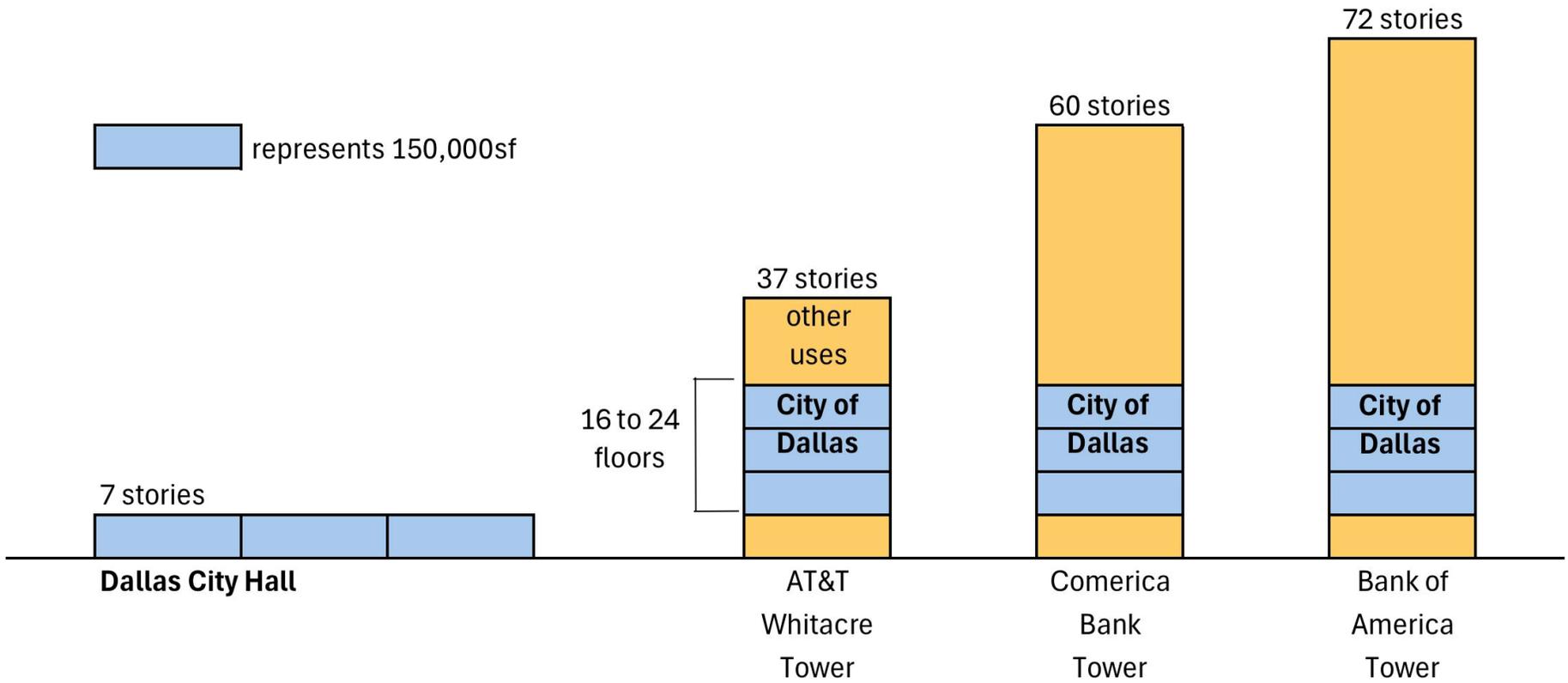
HIGH RISE OPTIONS TO CITY HALL INCLUDE BANK OF AMERICA, COMERICA, and AT&T TOWERS.

Comparison of the smaller floorplates of these buildings to the floorplate of Dallas City Hall illustrates why large users of space have opted for horizontal campuses with larger floors. **This is why Goldman Sachs is building a new building in Dallas's North End and why AT&T recently announced their move to Plano.**

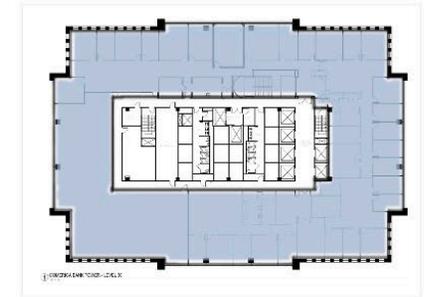
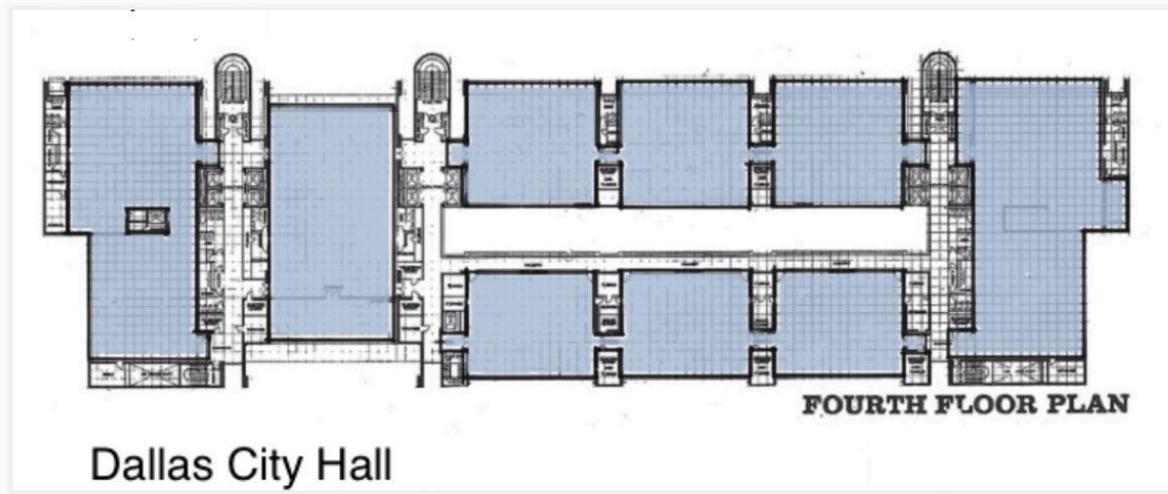
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The floorplates of the 1980's high rises downtown do not provide the type of environment needed to attract the best talent, provide a collaborative environment and allow for maximum flexibility of operations and space planning.

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The assertion that downtown Dallas is full of highly desirable, modern office space misrepresents reality. The obsolescence of our downtown high rises is the main reason downtown high rises have higher vacancies.

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The high-rise office buildings in the CBD which might be considered as an alternative location for City government were completed in the late-1980's, only 10 years newer than City Hall.



These diagrams illustrate how much space Dallas City Hall would occupy in a downtown high rise. City functions would occupy only 50% of the AT&T tower, 30% of Comerica Tower, and 25% of Bank of America Tower. Efficiency, security, convenient access for the public, and parking would be significant issues in a tower shared with other uses.



Comerica Tower



BOA Tower

Floorplan Comparison (to scale) 0' 100'

These floor plans illustrate that Dallas City Hall offers more than twice as much column-free area per floor than 1980's towers downtown. And these floors of 25,000SF on average cannot accommodate the important requirements for public facing and ceremonial spaces inherent in our seat of City government.

IS SPENDING MONEY TO REPAIR AND UPDATE CITY HALL WASTEFUL?

Some have said that City Hall is “too far gone”, “dilapidated”, and “falling down”. Our experience as architects is that the deferred maintenance issues at City Hall are not unusual for a 50-year-old building.

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Dallas City Hall is a building constructed to last 100-years or more. Casual comments about the building “falling down” and failing structurally are inaccurate and highly misleading.

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Repairing and reorganizing City Hall is likely faster and more economical with taxpayer dollars than alternatives.

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If constructed new today, our City Hall could cost \$600 to \$800 million. The taxpayers own the building free-and-clear. Abandoning or demolishing City Hall as a result of a hurried process is not financially or strategically prudent.

WILL ABANDONING CITY HALL SAVE DOWNTOWN?

We agree that Downtown Dallas needs bold thinking and visionary leadership. Now is the time to address the future of our 900-acre CBD in strategic, creative ways. However, demolishing City Hall for an alternate land use is not strategic. It is destructive.

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The significant improvements over the past 20 years in the Dallas CBD are the result of a robust parks program, the preservation of historic buildings and the adaptive reuse of more contemporary office towers, often with conversion to residential and hotel uses.

LET'S REIMAGINE DALLAS CITY HALL A CATALYST FOR A RENEWED SOUTHERN CBD.

Our existing City Hall space could easily be renovated to reflect best practices in modern workplace design. These spaces could reflect the optimism and openness of our city.



The City Hall Plaza could be reimagined as a greener, and more usable space. A wide variety of outdoor environments including restaurants, food trucks, play areas, and art are all possible.



A re-envisioning of the City Hall campus could consolidate departments from the Oak Cliff Municipal Center and other remote locations for greater efficiency and friendlier customer service. Implementing a much discussed “One-Stop Shop” for processing zoning and building permit activities would be possible.

In conjunction with this expansion, the City could bring amenities such as a coffee shop and restaurants to the campus to serve employees, Downtown residents and visitors alike.

CONCLUSION

**KEEPING CITY GOVERNMENT AT A REVITALIZED
DALLAS CITY HALL WILL BE A CATALYST, NOT AN
IMPEDIMENT, TO A ROBUST CBD.**

**ABANDONING CITY HALL IS NOT IN THE BEST INTEREST
OF TAXPAYERS, DOWNTOWN VIBRANCY, OR THE CITY OF
DALLAS.**

This analysis was prepared by the Ten Presidents, an informal collaboration of Dallas architects, each a Fellow of the AIA and a former President of an AIA component at a national, state or local level.

For reasons of financial, heritage, cultural and environmental responsibility, all are opposed to abandonment of Dallas City Hall.

The Ten Presidents (yes, there are now more than ten of us) are:

Larry Good, FAIA	1986 AIA Dallas President
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Craig Reynolds, FAIA	2004 AIA Dallas President + 2012 TxA President
Jeff Potter, FAIA	2004 TxA President + 2012 AIA National President
Tipton Housewright, FAIA	2005 AIA Dallas President
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