



U.S. General Services Administration

January 30, 2026

Via Email

Mr. Rick McKenney
Unum Group
President & CEO
1 Fountain Square
Chattanooga, TN 37402

The Honorable Weston Wamp
Mayor, Hamilton County
625 Georgia Avenue
Chattanooga, TN 37402

The Honorable Tim Kelly
Mayor, City of
Chattanooga
101 E. 11th Street
Chattanooga, TN 37402

Ms. Emily Mack
River City Company
President & CEO
850 Market St., Suite 200
Chattanooga, TN 37402

Mr. Charles Wood
President & CEO
Chattanooga Area Chamber
of Commerce
811 Broad Street #200
Chattanooga, TN 37402

Dear Stakeholders:

On January 16, 2026, at the request of Senator Marsha Blackburn, I and members of my staff at the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) met with local stakeholders to discuss the Chattanooga Federal Courthouse project. The purpose of this meeting was to address the request to reconsider the previously selected Vine Street location for the new courthouse, as made on January 15, 2025.

My comprehensive inspection of the existing Joel W. Solomon Federal Building and Courthouse has definitively confirmed the urgent and critically necessary need to replace this facility. Constructed in 1931, the current courthouse presents significant and irreconcilable operational challenges that fundamentally compromise judicial functionality and public safety. The facility fails to meet essential standards, including the U.S. Courts Design Guide and U.S. Marshals Service requirements. Specific deficiencies include:

- inadequate secure prisoner transport capabilities;
- lack of proper circulation separation between public, judicial, and in-custody areas;
- insufficient space to support current caseloads and future judicial growth; and
- structural limitations preventing resolution of operational and security risks.

The replacement of this courthouse is not a discretionary matter, but an imperative to ensure the safety of judges, court personnel, litigants, and the public. A modern facility is essential to restore compliant, secure court operations, and to provide Chattanooga with a judicial infrastructure capable of serving the community's long-term needs. As such, GSA has developed a comprehensive project schedule to expedite its completion, and any additional delays are unacceptable. Therefore, the project will proceed as proposed at the Vine Street site.

Congress has already appropriated nearly \$240 million in funding for the new courthouse project, and over a year ago, GSA identified the Vine Street site as the most advantageous site for locating the new courthouse. GSA completed a comprehensive site selection process for this project, including extensive stakeholder engagement and prior evaluation of the TVA site. That process resulted in the selection of a site based on schedule, cost, security, constructability, and overall risk considerations. The Vine Street site remains the most advantageous site as the weaknesses of the TVA site still exist and cannot be overcome. Those weaknesses include:

- **Operational Security Deficiencies:** The irregular, elongated proportions of the site present significant challenges for security mitigation. For example, the site's shape increases the need for setback mitigation measures, such as adding structural security improvements related to blast mitigation and progressive collapse. Furthermore, the narrow nature of the site creates complexities in (a) designing and constructing appropriate separation for prisoner movement, members of the public, and the Federal Judiciary; (b) providing secure parking for law enforcement personnel and the Federal Judiciary.
- **Minimum 2-Year Delay to Construction Start:** Demolition and operational dependencies would delay site readiness until at least July 2028.
- **Significantly Higher Costs:** Use of the TVA site would add as much as \$117 million in increased construction and design costs due to constrained footprint, increased construction complexity and schedule delays at the expense of the American taxpayers.
- **Longer Construction Duration:** The site's narrow and irregular shape would require inefficient high-rise construction, extending the construction timeline to 3 years versus 2.5 years for Vine Street.
- **Architectural Non-Compliance:** The site configuration severely limits GSA's ability to comply with the *Presidential Memorandum on Promoting Beautiful Federal Civic Architecture*.
- **Extended Use of Existing Facility:** The Judiciary would need to remain in the current building for an additional 2.5 years, incurring approximately \$6.5 million in additional operations and maintenance costs and continued exposure to the risks and serious operational and building deficiencies outlined above.

I appreciate the continued engagement on this important matter. Siting a new federal courthouse within a community is a once in a lifetime endeavor, and it is a responsibility I take seriously. Any deviation from GSA's comprehensive project schedule to expedite the courthouse's completion is unacceptable, and GSA reconfirms the decision made on January 15, 2025, for the new courthouse at the Vine Street site.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'E. Forst', is positioned above the printed name.

Edward C. Forst
Administrator

cc: Senator Marsha Blackburn
Liz Ahmed, Executive Vice President for Real Estate (Unum)
John Haley, Assistant Vice President, Government Affairs (Unum)
Todd Womack, President & CEO (Bridge Public Affairs)
Jeremy Fisher, Executive Vice President & Chief Business Officer (TVA)
David Bowling, Senior Vice President (TVA)
Bevin Taylor, Vice President, Government Relations (TVA)
Perry and Debbie Underwood, JT Holdings