



Travis County Commissioners Court Agenda Request

Meeting Date: March 6, 2012

Prepared By:

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Director/Manager: Roger A. El Khoury, M.S., P.E., Director, FMD

Department Head: Steven M. Manilla, P.E., County Executive-TNR

Sponsoring Court Members: County Judge Samuel T. Biscoe

AGENDA LANGUAGE: Consider and take appropriate action on schematic design for the Phase 1 landscape improvements at the Heman Marion Sweatt Courthouse.

BACKGROUND/SUMMARY OF REQUEST:

On August 2, 2011, Facilities Management Department recommended that Commissioners Court authorize a project to address deteriorated landscape conditions and exterior cleaning at the Heman Marion Sweatt Courthouse.

In November 2011, Travis County procured the services of TBG Partners, Inc., a landscape architecture and design firm based in Austin, to design and supervise construction of a new landscape plan for the Heman Marion Sweatt Travis County Courthouse at 1000 Guadalupe Street. Because of the historic nature of the site, the Texas Historical Commission is involved in the regulatory oversight of this effort.

The project scope and design parameters include new irrigation, new lighting for the building and grounds, new plantings and sod, tree evaluation and maintenance, and drainage treatment. The scope also includes a Cultural Landscape Narrative to describe the history of the site and therefore be a basis for the new landscape design.

Project assumptions reflect that the existing Judges parking lot would not be included in the scope of work, and that the landscape improvements proposed would be in place until a full restoration of the Heman Marion Sweatt Courthouse could take place, projected for 2025 or beyond. Phase 1 is the landscape improvement proposed for implementation this year. Phase 2 is the future landscape improvement after the Courthouse restoration.

TBG has now completed a Cultural Landscape Narrative and a Phase 1 Schematic Design plan, along with three conceptual options for Phase 2, attached, which are being presented to the Commissioners Court for discussion and direction.

The Phase 1 Schematic Design plan addresses all project scope requirements and concerns. The landscape design encompasses two different eras (i.e. historic restoration reference dates), 1931 and 1958, in a way that enhances existing conditions without imposing an entirely different design on the site. The main east entry of the building has not changed much since 1931, so that era is appropriate for this primary feature. The existing curved sidewalk will be maintained and side plantings will be incorporated that reflect the 1931 design of that portion of the site. At the north and south portions of the building, the areas will respond to the 1958 footprint of the building expansion. Retaining walls will be built to transition the strong grade changes and a visually discreet, perimeter drainage system around the edge of the building will be incorporated to protect the building from splashed soil.

The Phase 1 Schematic Plan design responds mostly to existing conditions, while addressing the main issues of drainage, erosion control, plantings, tree care and lighting. The Phase 1 design direction acknowledges the two most important restoration eras for the building, without prioritizing one over the other and therefore does not limit the further future discussion of building restoration dates during the preparation of the Historic Courthouse Preservation Master Plan.

The three options for Phase 2 show illustrations for a possible range of design strategies which could occur in the future on the west side of the Courthouse, in coordination with the historic restoration of the Courthouse and the expansion of the Criminal Justice Center, to create an enhanced civic outdoor space linking these important civic buildings with each other and the historic Wooldridge Square Park, and restoring the civic presence of the historic Courthouse within the changing context of the surrounding site.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

Facilities Management Department recommends that the Commissioners Court approve the proposed Phase 1 Schematic Design concepts as proposed by TBG Partners, Inc.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

The Commissioners Court may either:

- A. Approve the Phase 1 Schematic Design plan as presented; or
- B. Approve the Phase 1 Schematic Design and direct that the landscape design include a bid alternate for conversion of a portion of the Judges parking lot flanking the primary Courthouse entry into a landscaped area.

Conversion of part of the judges parking lot flanking the primary Courthouse entry to a landscaped area would balance the design symmetry of this area. Four parking spaces would need to be reassigned nearby. The rest of the judges parking lot would be converted to landscaped area in the future, consistent with the historic site plan and the Central Campus Master Plan.

FISCAL IMPACT AND SOURCE OF FUNDING:

The project is currently funded in the Facilities Management budget.

ATTACHMENTS/EXHIBITS:

- 1. Power point presentation
- 2. Cultural Landscape Narrative for Heman Marion Sweatt Courthouse site
- 3. Phase 1 Era Diagram (11x17 format)
- 4. Phase 1 Schematic Plan (11x17 format)
- 5. Three Conceptual Plans for future Phase 2 (11x17 format)

REQUIRED AUTHORIZATIONS:

N/A

CC:

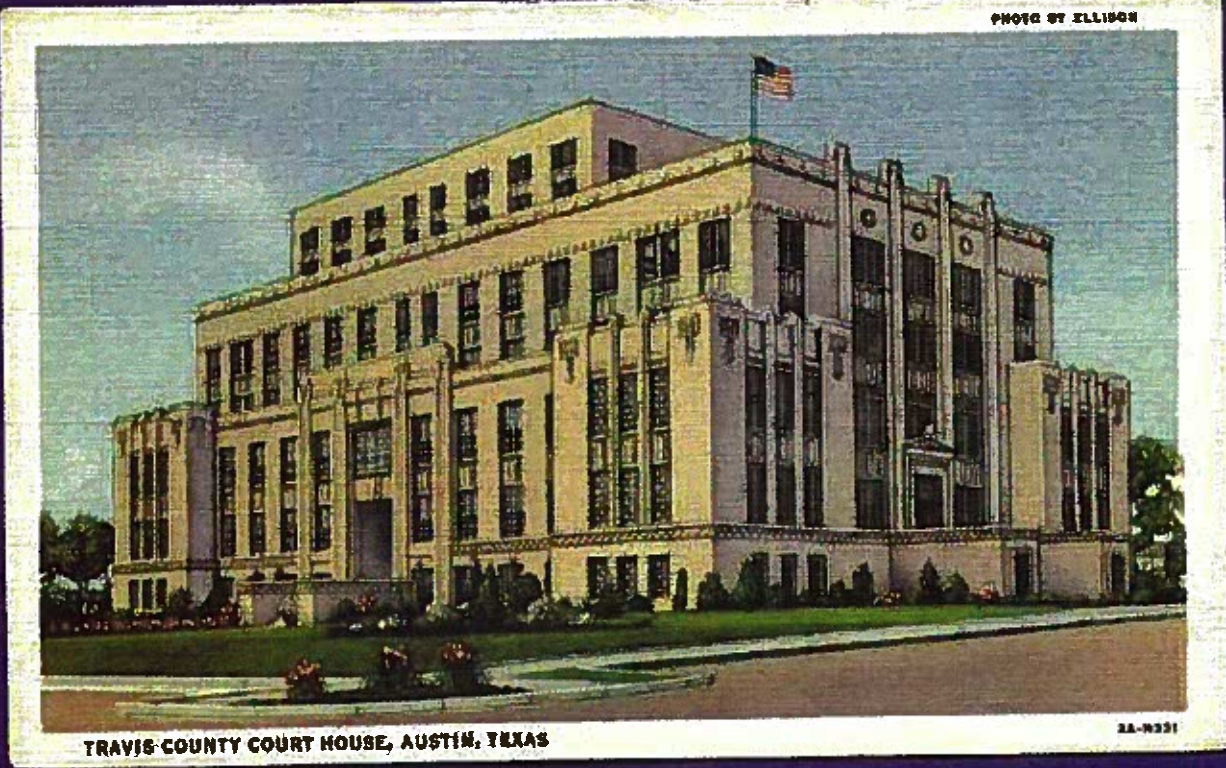
The Honorable John K. Dietz, 250th District Court
The Honorable Lora J. Livingston, 353rd District Court
The Honorable Scott H. Jenkins, 53rd District Court
The Honorable Rhonda Hurley, 98th District Court
The Honorable Darlene Byrne, 126th District Court
The Honorable Gisela Triana, 200th District Court
The Honorable Amy Clark Meachum, 201st District Court
The Honorable Stephen Yelenosky, 345th District Court
The Honorable Tim Sulak, 353rd District Court

The Honorable Orlinda Naranjo, 419th District Court
The Honorable J. David Phillips, County Court-at-Law #1
The Honorable Eric Shepperd, County Court-at-Law #2
The Honorable Guy Herman, Probate Court
The Honorable Herb Evans, Justice of the Peace, Precinct 5
The Honorable Amalia Rodriguez-Mendoza, District Clerk
The Honorable Dana DeBeauvoir, County Clerk
Peg Liedtke, Civil Court Administrator
Leslie Stricklan, Senior Project Manager, FMD

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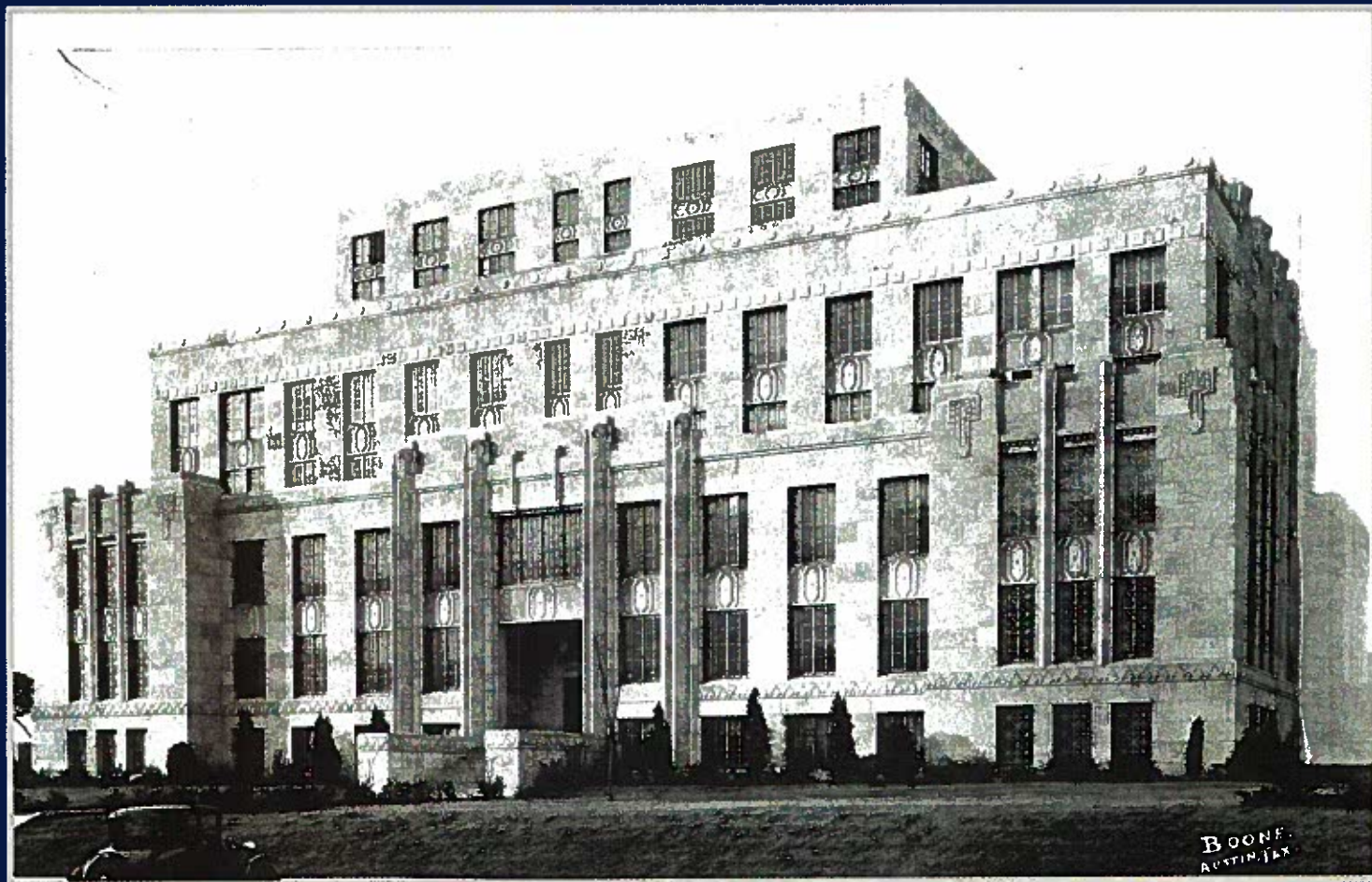
T B G

WEST ELEVENTH STREET



HEMAN MARION SWEATT
 TRAVIS COUNTY COURTHOUSE

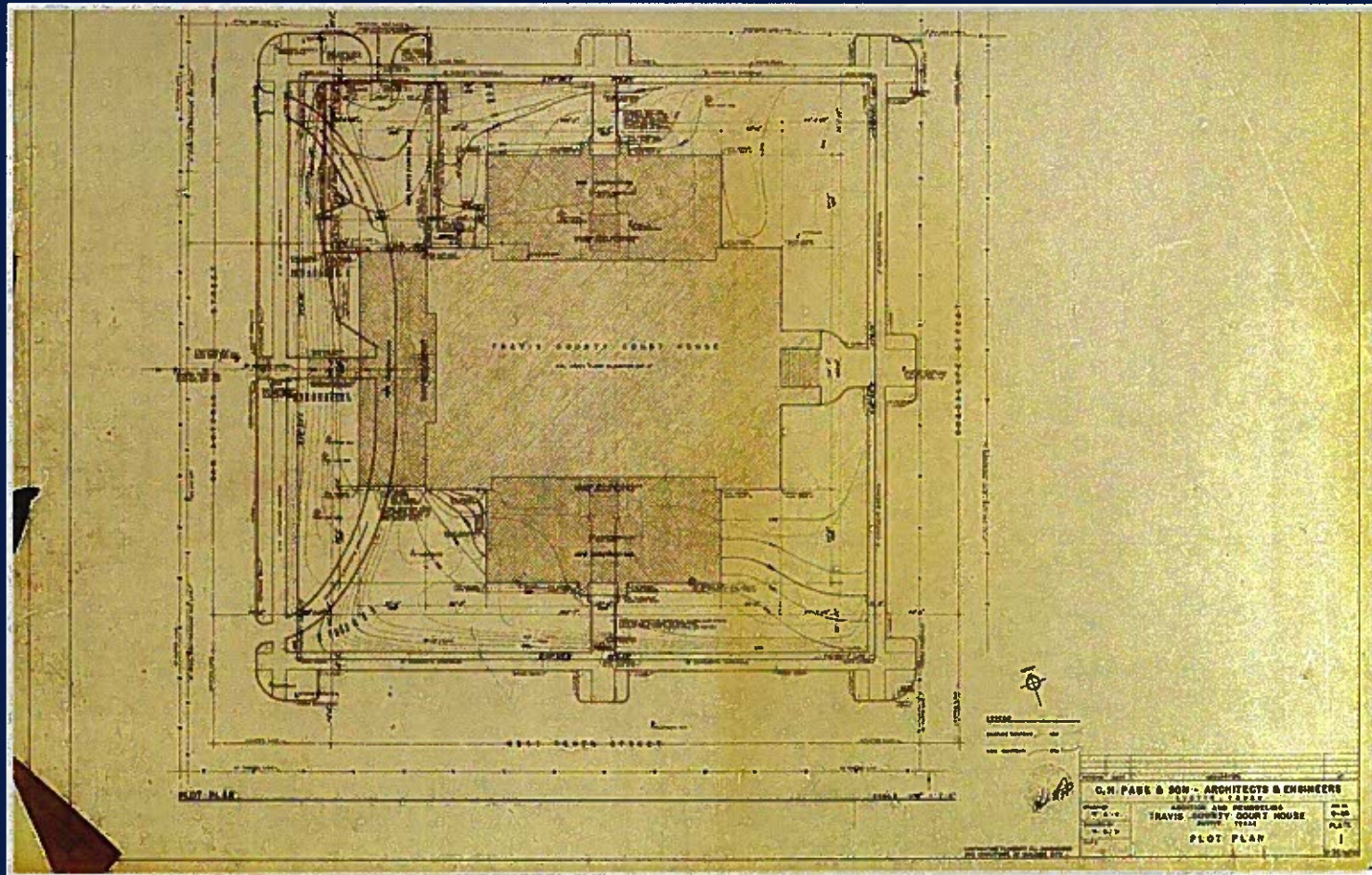
T. M. SWEATT



- Prepared by County Engineer J.G. Morgan, the courthouses landscape plan was consistent with the building's modern style and included strong geometric forms using many evergreen plant materials.



- The strong vertical lines of the cypress trees provide scale, character and a sense of order in the landscape, shown here in 1941 with plantings that had matured over the past decade.



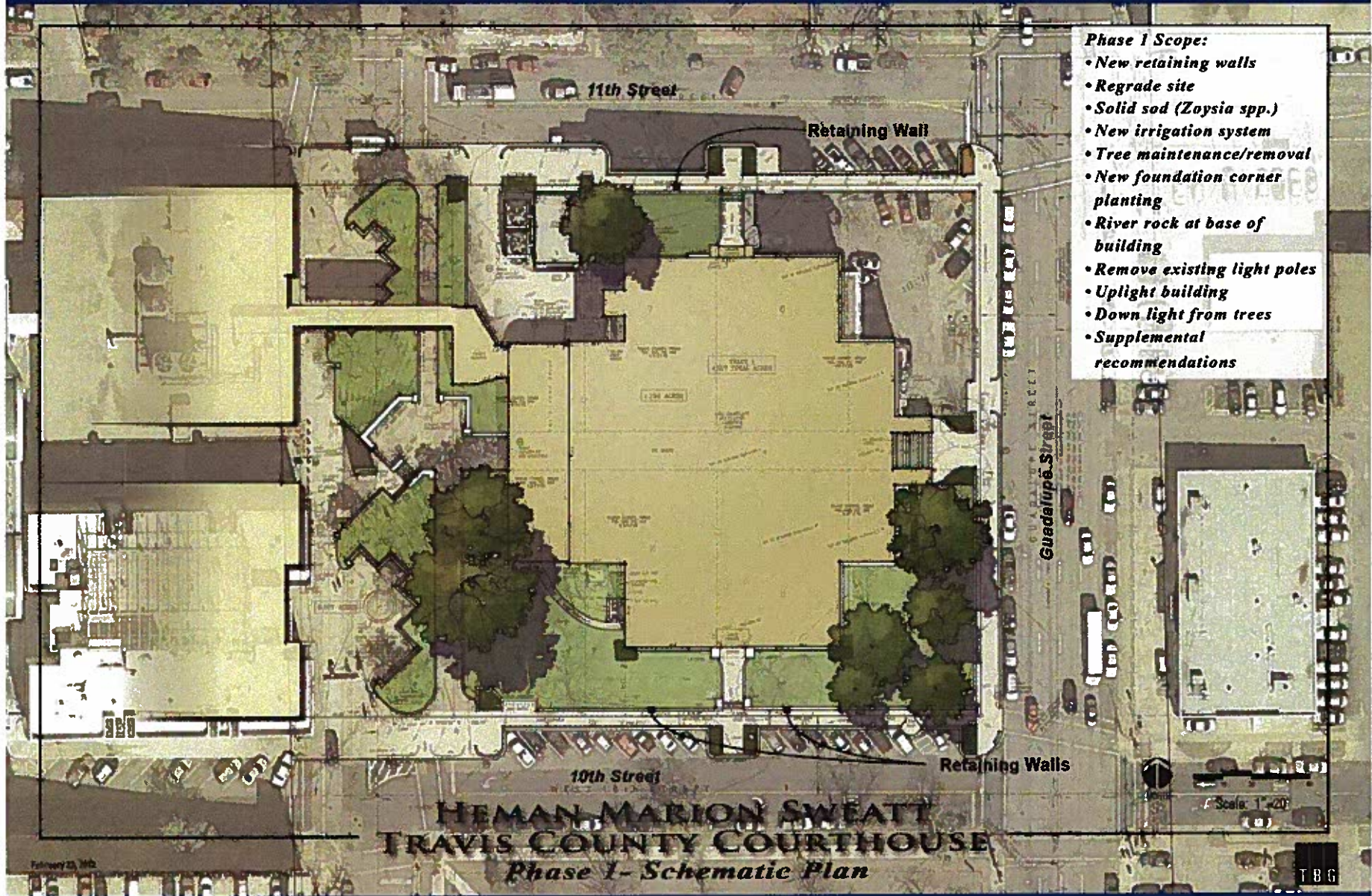
- A 1958 renovation guided the landscape in the City Beautiful Movement, characterized by the removal of most of the sculptural, formal plant materials.

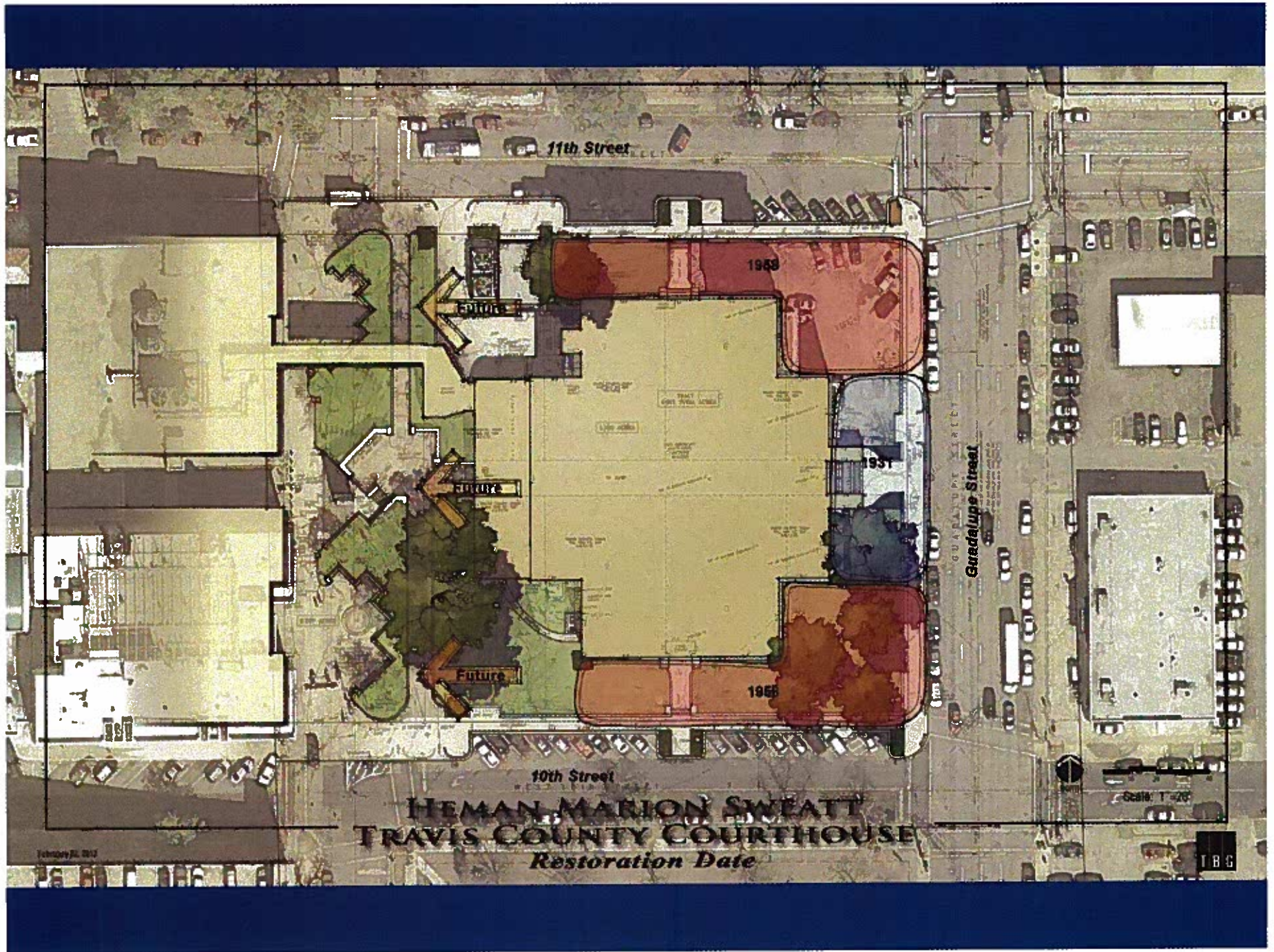


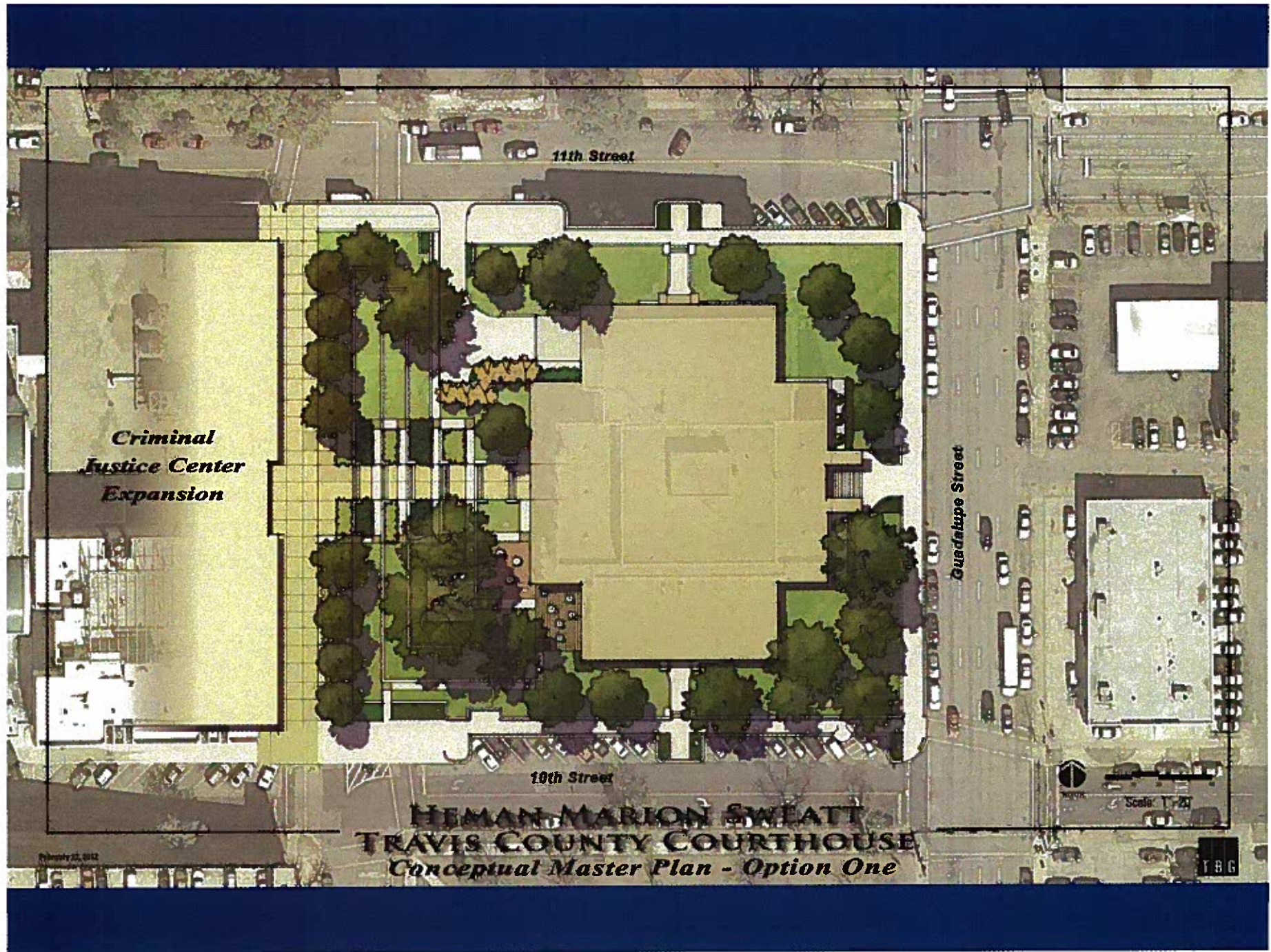
- A rendering from 1956 showcases the courthouse's first expansion and remodeling, which introduced a more park-like setting on the landscape grounds.

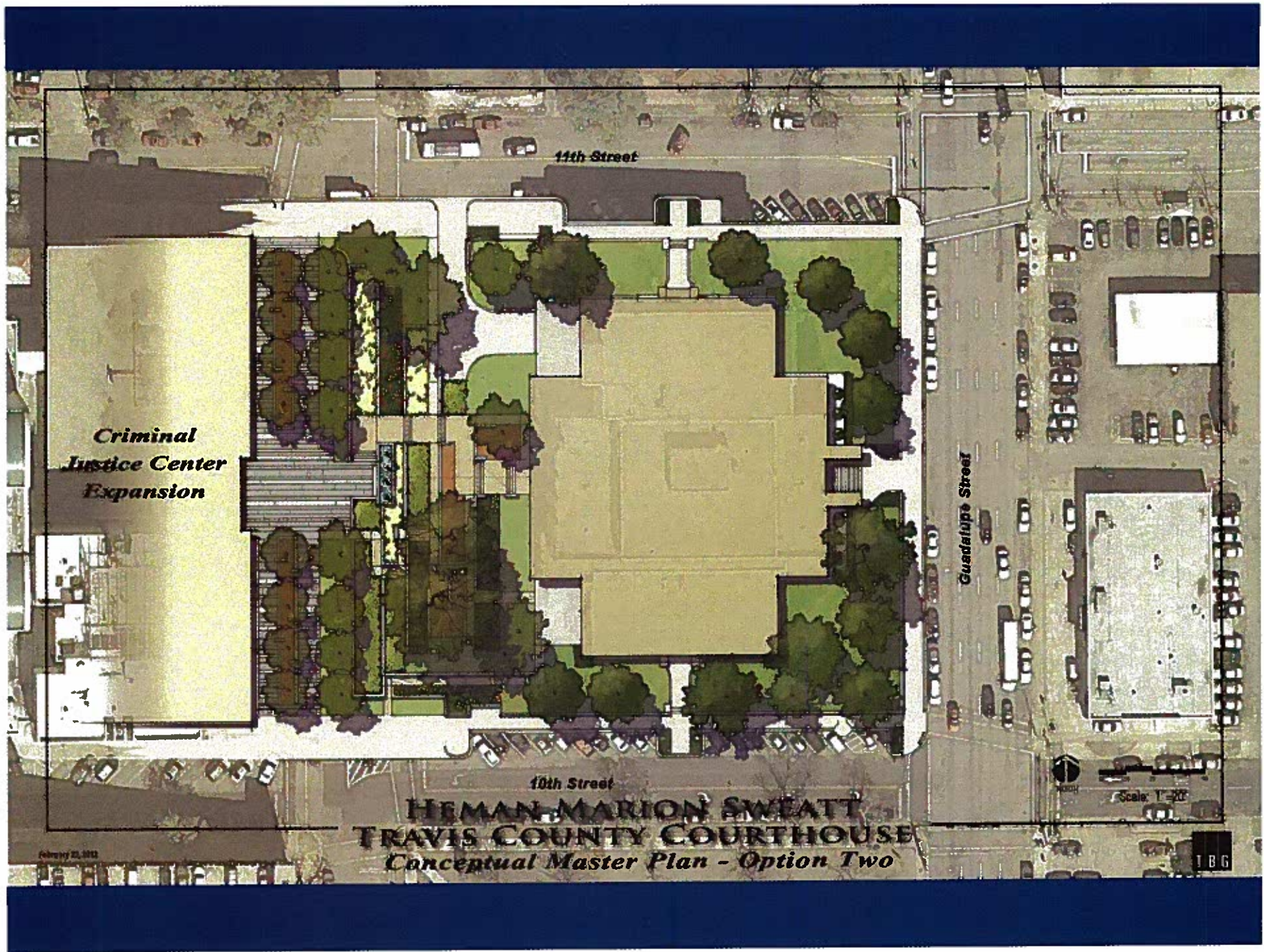


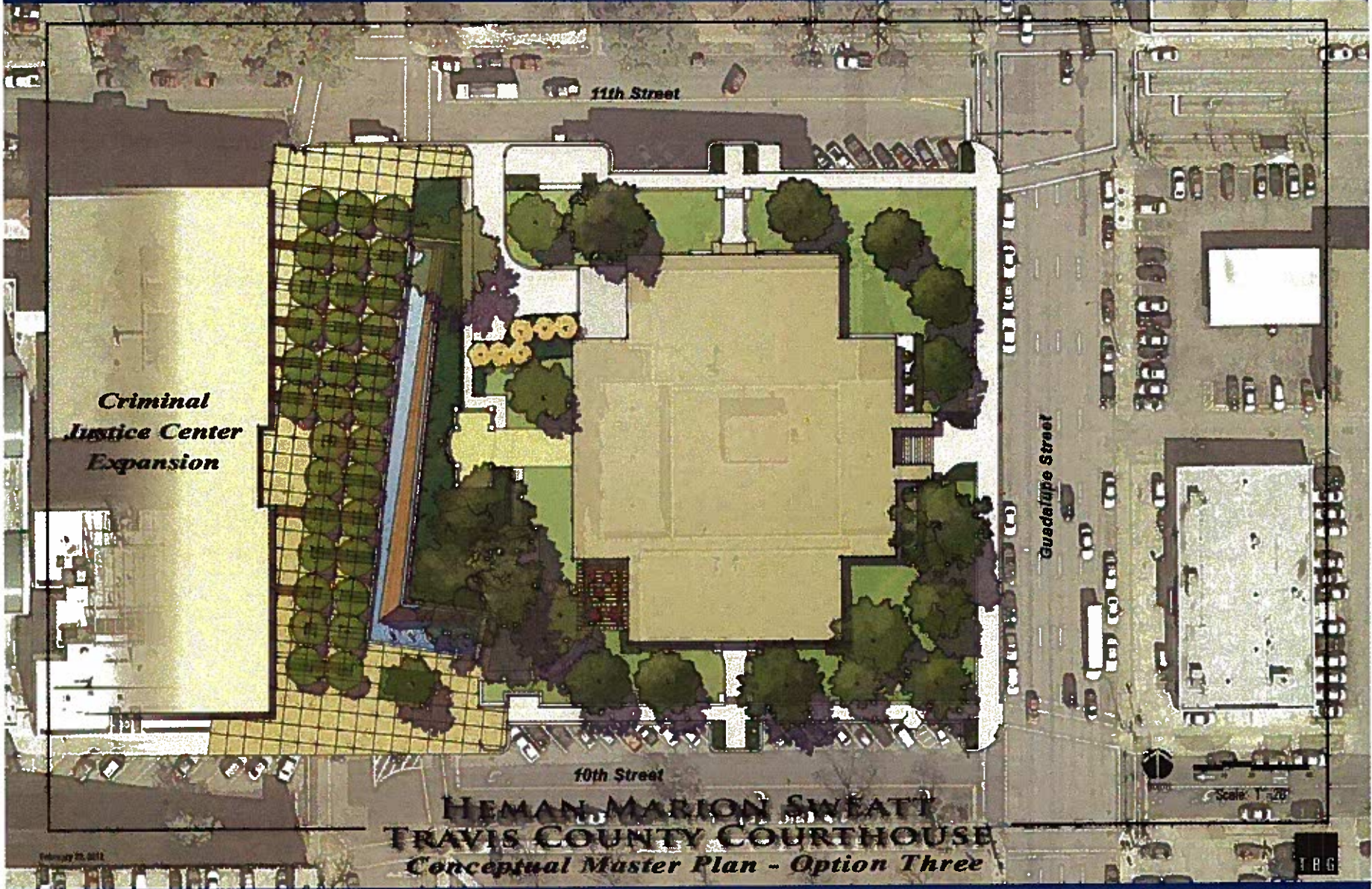
- This image, circa 1959, displays alterations made during the renovation the previous year; planting is minimal with planting beds ordered with heavy tree canopies.











**Criminal
Justice Center
Expansion**

11th Street

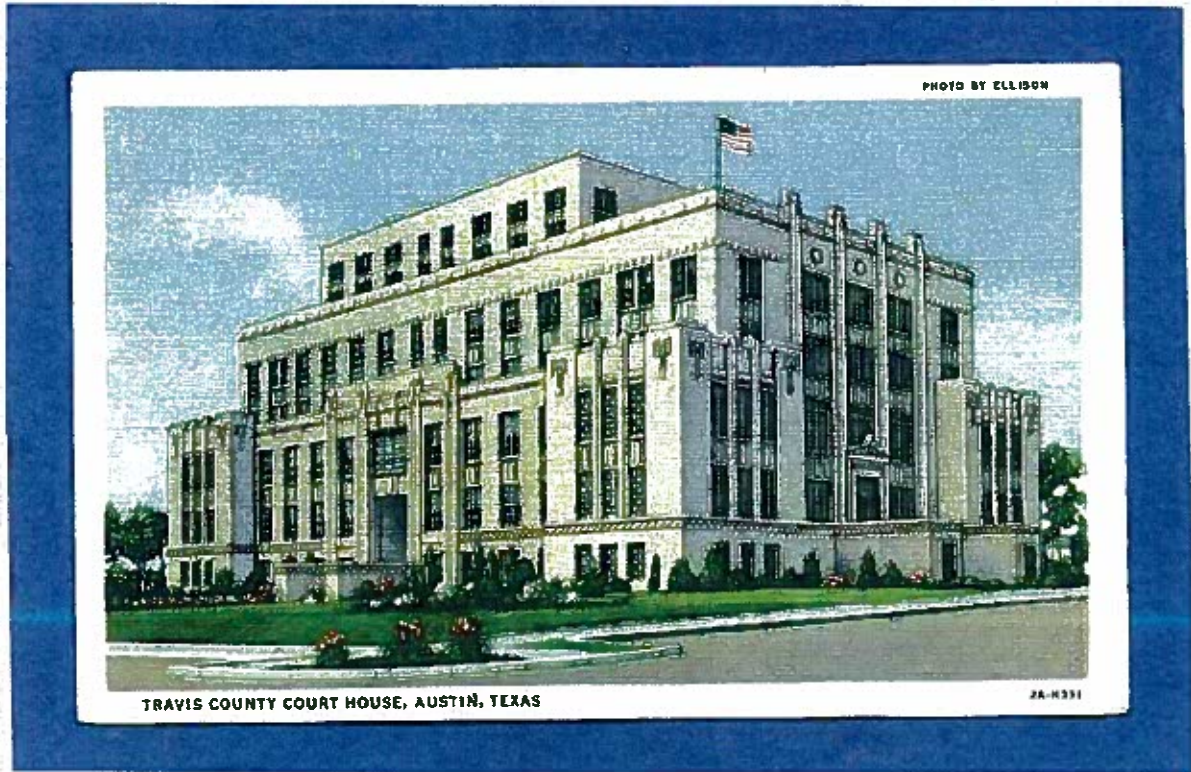
Guadalupe Street

10th Street

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TRAVIS COUNTY COURTHOUSE**
Conceptual Master Plan - Option Three

Scale: 1"=20'

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HEMAN MARION SWEATT TRAVIS COUNTY COURTHOUSE

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE NARRATIVE

February 17, 2012

OBJECTIVE

In the spring of 2009 Travis County started the process to generate a needs assessment and physical plan for their Central Campus in Downtown Austin. The Travis County Central Campus 2010-2035 Study was divided into two phases. Phase One is a Needs Assessment and Phase Two is the Facilities Master Plan that will provide a phased strategy for meeting the needs identified in the Needs Analysis.

This cultural landscape narrative for the Heman Marion Sweatt Travis County Courthouse will guide the design team as a preservation plan for landscape and sitework improvements provided by TBG Partners. The 1958 period of significance for this report was determined by the major expansion and remodeling that occurred at the courthouse starting in 1955. This cultural landscape narrative relies on the information gathered in a historic structures report by Limbacher & Godfrey Architects in 2010 as part of the Travis County Central Campus Facilities Master Plan.

HISTORY

The Travis County Courthouse, which became Heman Marion Sweatt Travis County Courthouse in 2005, was originally constructed in 1930 by H.E. Wattinger Contractors. It is the third courthouse building in Travis county. The site for the courthouse was selected adjacent to Wooldridge Square, one of the 4 original town squares in Austin, and was designed by Page Brothers Architects in a modern style divergent from courthouse styles of the past. The topography of the site was modified so that the courthouse sat atop a gently sloped pedestal earth form at the center of the site. The architectural style, Art Deco or Moderne, was defined during the design exposition held in Paris in 1925, The Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industrielles Modernes. The architectural style of the courthouse is characterized by the use of simple forms with decorative elements emphasizing an overall vertical composition arranged to draw the eye upwards.¹ The Paris exhibition exuded an imagery of opulence and luxury, albeit in Machine Age terms and on a compact scale in keeping with the economic realities of the times."²

1 Limbacher & Godfrey, Historic Structures Report, August 2010, p.8.

2 Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, *Landscape Design A Cultural and Architectural History* (New York: Abrams Books, 2001), p. 436.



Photo courtesy of the Austin History Center, C7830, (1931-) PICA 04671

The landscape architect, J. L. Gubbels, of Gubbels Landscape Architects might have been influenced by the design trends during the time of construction of the new courthouse, but we don't know how much of his design was actually implemented. His proposal for the landscape and site improvement work included the installation of stone faced landscape walls, concrete sidewalks, turf grass and about 350 shrubs in the amount of \$20, 257. However, under the direction of a newly elected County Judge and Commissioners Court, a new landscape plan was prepared by County Engineer J.G. Morgan. The new plan saved \$7,000 and while there are no known drawings or itemized proposal for the Morgan plan, it can be assumed that the plan was much simplified from the Gubbels plan.³ The landscape design that was installed in 1930 was consistent with the modern style of the building with strong geometric forms using many evergreen plant materials. In the ceremonial public space that the courthouse provides, "humans tend to shape the environment with rational geometry" and the strong vertical lines of the cypress trees give a sense of "power and control" in the landscape.⁴

3 Limbacher & Godfrey, *Historic Structures Report*, August 2010, p.14.

4 D.W. Meinig, *The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979)

In 1955, the Court considered enlarging, air conditioning and remodeling the courthouse. They enlisted C.H. Page & Son, Architects & Engineers, the successor firm to Page Brothers Architects.⁵ Bonds were sold over the course of almost one year and plans were issued to bidders in early 1958. Renovation work began in April and was completed in about a year.

1958 is the period of significance for this report because the architectural style shifted and the landscape was impacted greatly. The telescoping vertical form of the courthouse became much wider with a sprawling base and three story additions to the north and south faces of the building. The modernist architectural movement of the courthouse's original construction transitioned into the Post Moderne architecture style that was prominent from the 1950's to 1970's. Two levels were added to the west side of the courthouse and a porte cochere was added. The existing driveway was removed and a new drive was added along with a new paved parking area. The new parking area was accessed from West Eleventh Street and had a perimeter retaining wall.

5 Limbacher & Godfrey, Historic Structures Report, August 2010, p.29.



Photo courtesy of the Austin History Center, (1941)

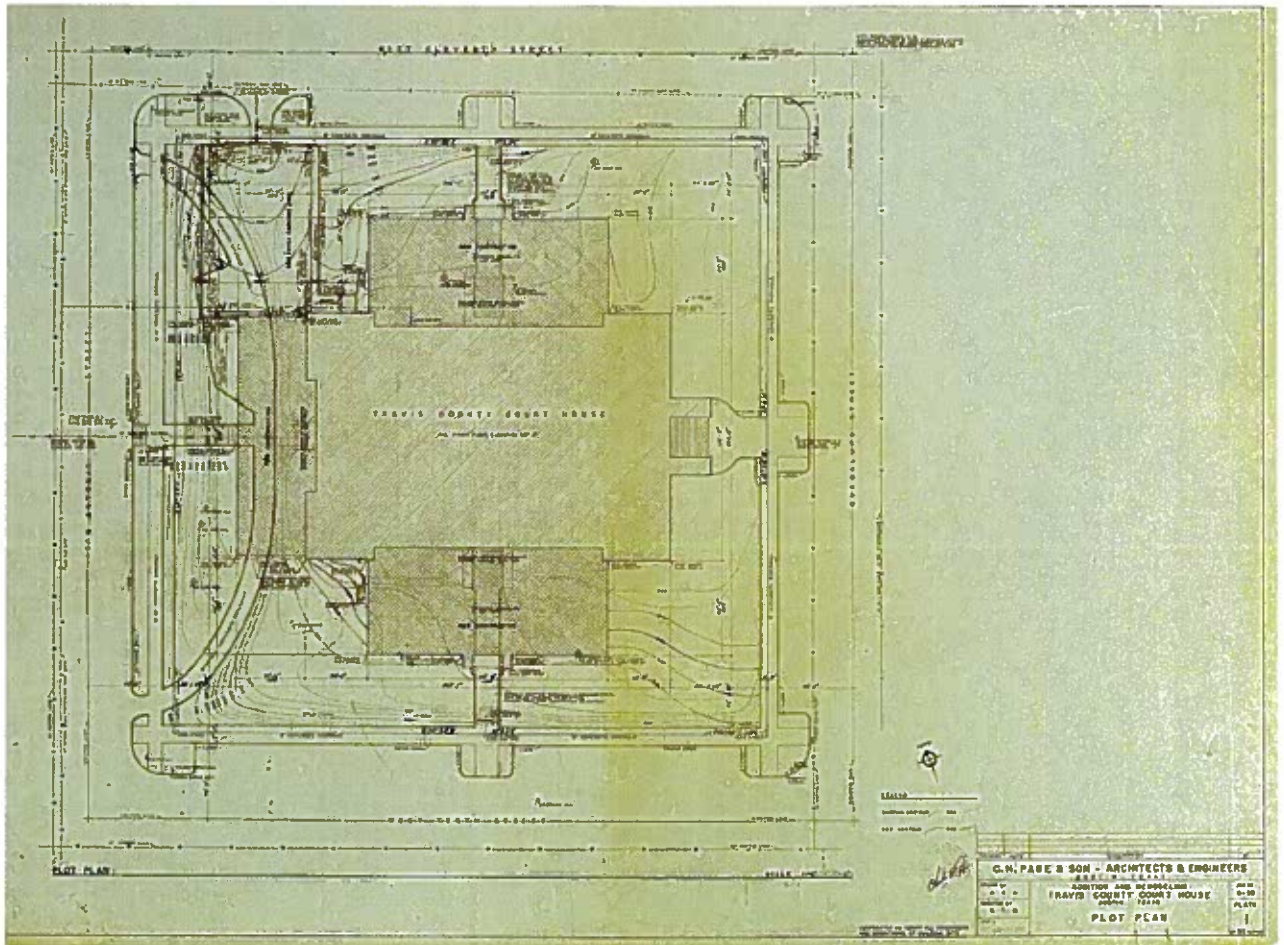


Photo courtesy of the Austin History Center, 1958 drawing by C.H. Page & Son Architects and Engineers

There is very little information about the landscape modifications that occurred at the 1958 renovation. However, with the addition of the porte cochere and the removal of most of the sculptural, formal plant materials, it can be inferred that the courthouse landscape took on a style more consistent with the City Beautiful Movement. The courthouse's edges were softened by shrub mounds. However, minimal plant materials were added after the renovation which is consistent with the Post Moderne architectural style.



Photo courtesy of Limbacher&Godfrey- Architect's rendering of the first expansion and remodeling of the courthouse prepared by C.H. Page& Son, Austin American, November 11, 1956

GOALS

TBG's plan for landscape improvements at the Heman Marion Sweatt Travis County Courthouse proposes to restore the grounds, to the greatest extent possible, to the time period that reflects the 1958 renovation of the courthouse building while also incorporating some landscape elements present when the courthouse opened in 1931. The landscape style will blend the City Beautiful Movement (for the majority of the grounds), an approach defined by structured, formal and park-like aesthetics with the Art Deco/Moderne style that remained in 1958 from the original construction in 1931.



Photo courtesy of the Austin History Center, (1959), PICA 25400

Specific modifications proposed for the landscape improvements will include removing shrubs along the foundation of the courthouse. The addition of a gravel band along the building edge will clean up the perimeter and allow for easier maintenance. Structural hedges will be removed and trees will be pruned for optimal health and appearance. Minimal planting will be added to disturbed areas to provide a simple, clean aesthetic. Short retaining walls will be added on 3 corners of the site to hold up the steep slope at the perimeter sidewalk. Planting in the area called 1931 district will be more formal and in line with the landscape style of 1931. Italian Cypress trees or Arborvitae provide the vertical formality consistent with the original courthouse landscape. The 1958 district contains the areas developed in the 1958 renovation. Sea Green Juniper softens the corners. Other planting is minimal similar to the landscape after the 1958 renovation and consistent with a Post Moderne architecture style. Also consistent with the City Beautiful movement, planting beds are ordered with heavy tree canopies.

11th Street

1958

Future

TRACT 1
4.017 TOTAL ACRES

1.762 ACRES

1931

Future

0.607 ACRES

Future

1958

Guadalupe Street

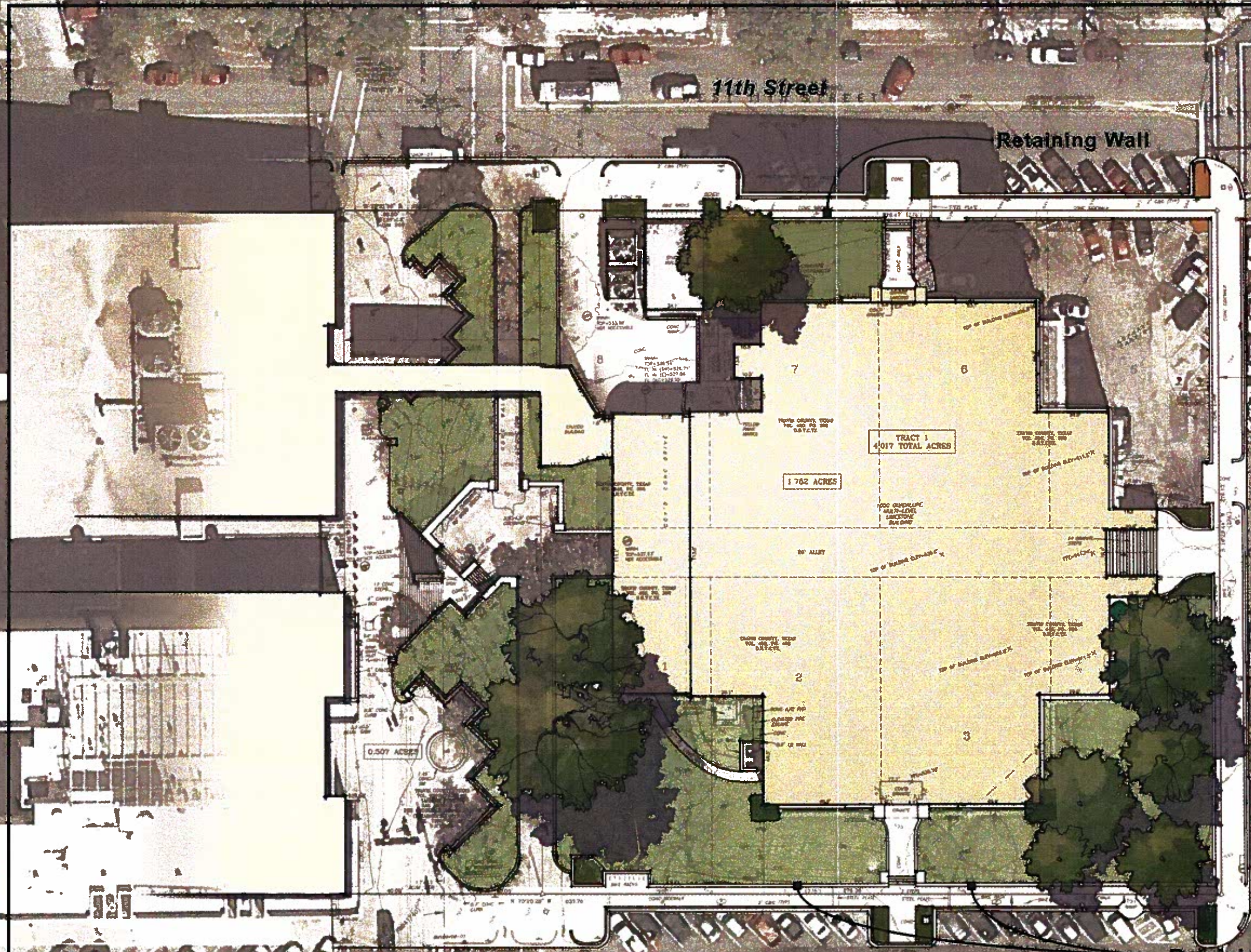
10th Street

HEMAN MARION SWEATT TRAVIS COUNTY COURTHOUSE *Restoration Date*



Scale: 1" = 20'

- Phase 1 Scope:**
- New retaining walls
 - Regrade site
 - Solid sod (*Zoysia spp.*)
 - New irrigation system
 - Tree maintenance/removal
 - New foundation corner planting
 - River rock at base of building
 - Remove existing light poles
 - Uplight building
 - Down light from trees
 - Supplemental recommendations



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Phase I - Schematic Plan**



11th Street

Guadalupe Street

10th Street

*Criminal
Justice Center
Expansion*

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Conceptual Master Plan - Option One



Scale: 1" = 20'

11th Street

Guadalupe Street

10th Street

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Conceptual Master Plan - Option Two



Scale: 1" = 40'

11th Street

Guadalupe Street

11th Street

*Criminal
Justice Center
Expansion*

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Conceptual Master Plan - Option Three

