

Estimate of Cost to Rehabilitate the Historic County Courthouses and City Halls of Georgia



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Executive Summary

Introduction

This study was commissioned with the following objectives:

- Use available data to estimate the number of historic courthouses and city halls in Georgia.
- Evaluate the overall current condition of this group of buildings.
- Define the funding needed to rehabilitate these significant structures.

The following organizations worked together to support the study:

- The Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG)
- The Georgia Municipal Association (GMA)
- The Historic Preservation Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (HPD)

The Office of Jack Pyburn, Inc., Historic Preservation Architects, conducted the study in conjunction with the professional cost-estimating firm of Hanscomb, Inc. The findings in this study are based upon the following:

- The organization of existing information about historic courthouses and city halls in Georgia gathered from the sponsoring agencies identified above;
- Phone surveys of each county and city with a known historic city hall or courthouse;
- Site visitation to a select group of buildings to check existing data and phone survey information; and
- Cost data from consulting team projects involving the rehabilitation of similar historic structures in Georgia.

This study is a direct result of the recommendations of the 1998 Final Report of the Joint Legislative Study Committee on Historic Preservation in Georgia. The committee identified historic courthouses and city halls as “invaluable community assets” that serve as “symbols of community pride and anchors for economic stability.” The study committee recognized that these buildings, as a group, were in many cases victims of deferred improvements that must be addressed soon for their continued viability. Further, it was determined that a supporting source of funding would likely



Savannah City Hall



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be required to assist local communities in the rehabilitation of their historic city hall and/or historic courthouse. The estimate produced in this study is intended for use in determining the funding needed to rehabilitate Georgia's historic city halls and courthouses.

The Need for Action

The stewardship of Georgia's historic courthouses and city halls is an important responsibility, the success of which impacts communities on many levels. City halls and courthouses are significant for their role in Georgia's heritage, and often serve as anchors within a community, around which downtown revitalization efforts, local economies, and tourism are centered.



Hall County Courthouse

The findings of this study indicate that many communities have not been able to obtain the necessary funding to maintain, update, or rehabilitate their historic buildings. For Georgia's historic city halls and courthouses, the study findings are as follows:

- Over 50% fall under a condition rating of poor or fair and are in jeopardy of further deterioration or demolition if near-term action to stabilize and improve them is not taken.
- It is likely that well over 75% of Georgia's city halls and courthouses do not fully meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Of the buildings surveyed in this study, 25% were found to be lacking the improvements necessary to meet the requirements of ADA.
- For the courthouses and city halls surveyed by the study team, over 65% had not been tested for hazardous materials or are known to have hazardous materials not yet abated. In the total count of historic city halls and courthouses in Georgia, that percentage is likely much higher.

Estimating the Cost to Rehabilitate Georgia's Historic Courthouses and City Halls

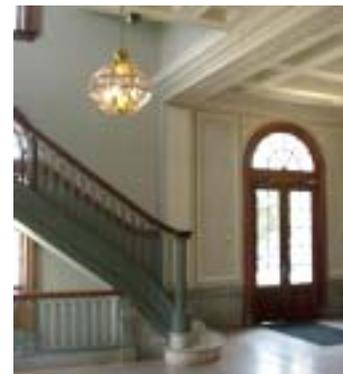
The ultimate mission of this study is to estimate a reasonable cost in current dollars to rehabilitate all of the historic courthouses and city halls in Georgia to a sound condition that preserves their character defining features and provides modern systems to support continued productive use. This task was challenging given the potential number of buildings involved, the resources for the study, and the state of available data on which to develop the



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estimated cost. In order to develop a viable rehabilitation cost the following study parameters were developed:

- Historic courthouses and city halls built prior to 1960 are represented in this study.
- Historic buildings not originally built as a city hall or courthouse that have been adapted to function for this role were included. (Example: A historic railroad depot now used as a city hall.)
- While all the historic courthouses in Georgia have been included in the study, all of the historic city halls in Georgia could not be identified. Therefore, a methodology for projecting city hall need was developed based upon a significant sample of known historic city halls in the state.
- The study includes buildings that are likely eligible for the National Register by virtue of age and character in addition to those already on the National Register of Historic Places.



Valdosta City Hall

Using the above parameters, a considerable cost database on recent historic rehabilitation projects, and a thoughtful methodology to project costs for the group of buildings for which there was no available data, the study findings are as follows:

- There are approximately 4.5 million square feet in historic city halls and courthouses found in 315 buildings.
- A conservative estimate of the total cost to rehabilitate Georgia's historic courthouses and city halls is \$466,000,000 in 2002 dollars.
- The courthouses included in the study had an average rehabilitation cost of \$2,100,000 per building while city halls had an average rehabilitation cost of \$800,000 per building. The difference is attributed to the fact that city halls are, on average, smaller than courthouses.

The following table summarizes the number of buildings in the study, the square footage evaluated, and the estimated rehabilitation cost for each building category.

	Number of Buildings Included	Square Feet	Dollar Cost
Courthouses	157	3,160,000	\$336,000,000
City Halls (known)	124	1,030,000	\$105,000,000
City Halls (projected)	34	240,000	\$25,000,000
Totals	315	4,430,000	\$466,000,000



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Conclusion

Georgia's historic city halls and courthouses are valuable resources. They are physical reminders of Georgia's heritage and architectural symbols that continue to support the delivery of public services. Many of these historically significant and viable structures are in need of rehabilitation and yet cities and counties struggle with a lack of adequate funding. These civic buildings have been useful and productive for previous generations and will continue to serve long into the future if their historic character is preserved and they are maintained in sound condition. This study has defined the funding required to ensure that these buildings continue to be a part of Georgia's architectural heritage, a source of civic pride, and a productive agent for community revitalization across the state. The total dollar value estimated to rehabilitate these buildings falls far short of their value to Georgia's history and future.

The solution to achieving the goal of rehabilitation will likely be multi-faceted. There is a diverse range of financial and technical capabilities across the state that must be recognized in producing physically sound and historically appropriate courthouses and city halls that can continue to serve their communities. The local option sales tax can assist in some locales. Grants from state agencies like the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, the Department of Natural Resources, and federal initiatives like the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Grant and Loan programs can make a meaningful contribution but cannot fulfill the vast majority of the need. In defining an estimate of the cost to rehabilitate Georgia's historic courthouses and city halls, this study provides the foundation for a meaningful discussion to determine the role of the State of Georgia, in partnership with local communities and the federal government, to protect and secure the future for some of its most significant historic resources, the historic city halls and courthouses of Georgia.



Monroe County Courthouse