

Architects selected to design state capitol

By TIMOTHY INKLEBARGER
Associated Press Writer

JUNEAU — It's been 46 years since Alaska statehood, and the Legislature still does not meet in a building designed to serve as a capitol.

The state took a step closer Tuesday to seeing a new legislative hall built. A jury has chosen a team of architects to design a statehouse that would replace a former territorial building used as the Capitol.

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"It is very nice for a state to say, 'We've grown up. We are now a real state,'" said Ed Feiner, one of nine jurors on Juneau's Capitol Planning Commission that selected the architects.

Since statehood in 1959, the Alaska Legislature has met in a federal building constructed in 1931. That legislative hall also was used during territorial days.

The small committee rooms often are cramped with people. The House of Representatives has 44 seats for the public, barely enough to seat one constituent for each of its 40 members. The Senate has just 32 seats in its gallery.

Feiner, a former chief architect for the General Services Commission in Washington, D.C., spent 23 years managing projects for federal courthouses, laboratories and other office buildings across the nation.

He said the panel chose the modern design by Thom Mayne of Morphosis, a California architectural firm, and Mike Mense of mmenseArchitects in Anchorage because of the team's innovation, creativi-

ty and pragmatism.

The design's most prominent feature is a 150-foot glass dome "designed to reflect precious light, making it particularly beautiful in rain and mist," according to the designers. The dome's interior would be etched with passages from the Alaska Constitution.

Juneau Mayor Bruce Botelho established the planning commission in late 2003 to pick a design concept for a new capitol.

He aims to have the building constructed at an estimated cost of \$100 million by 2009 for the state's 50th anniversary.

The futuristic designs of the four finalists in the design competition took many Alaskans by surprise, prompting a flurry of letters to newspapers across the state panning the proposals.

One resident wrote the Juneau Empire that a capitol should "not stand out like a sci-fi exhibit."

Botelho said the preliminary designs were intended to show the capabilities of the architectural teams and might not represent the final project. He said the design teams were given a few weeks to submit their proposals.

"For many, it was architec-

ture that people don't associate with Alaska," Botelho said Tuesday. "I think the point that we want to make is that this exercise was one that was intended to select a design team who could work with Alaskans in coming up with whatever that unique Alaskan icon of democracy would be."

Design finalist Mayne said the preliminary designs were intended to start a dialogue on what the capitol should look like.

"There's nothing that isn't up for change," Mayne said.

Botelho said he now will present a project to Gov. Frank Murkowski and the Legislature. This could be the biggest hurdle for the project.

Juneau, a city in the archipelago of Southeast Alaska's panhandle, is the only capital not connected by a road. Those traveling to Juneau must do so by boat or airplane.

The accessibility issue among other things has prompted several attempts to move the capital to the fastest-growing region of the state just north of Anchorage.

Several citizen initiatives since before statehood have aimed to move the capital but all have failed. The most recent effort to move the Legislature

failed by a 2-to-1 margin in 2002. Juneau spent more than \$2 million on a public relations campaign to fight the move attempt.

Passions over moving the capitol could make it difficult politically for lawmakers from other parts of the state to get behind the new capitol construction project.

Rep. Bill Stoltze, R-Chugiak, lives near the area where the capitol would have been located had past efforts succeeded.

"The mayor's stirred up a hornets' nest up north," he said. "I don't think there's a lot of support in the legislative branch for it. But I never underestimate the executive branch."

Win Gruening heads the Alaska Committee in Juneau, a nonprofit organization dedicated to keeping the Capitol in Juneau.

"I really don't know if this something that would put capitol move thoughts to rest or not," he said. "I just think it's part of Juneau's responsibility to advance these ideas so we make ourselves a better capital."

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Web posted February 25, 2005

New capitol is tough sell to chamber

Members of state group question cost, design

By I-CHUN CHE

JUNEAU EMPIRE

It is not just about the capitol. It's about the capital.

As members of the Alaska State Chamber of Commerce flew to Juneau to meet legislators the past two days, Juneau Mayor Bruce Botelho took the opportunity to sell his capitol building plan to them.

It was a tough sell.

Chamber member Ted Quinn of Juneau said the mayor would have a hard time persuading the Legislature to approve any of the four designs that were released last week.

"The concepts are a little bit out there," said Quinn, vice president of Capital Office Systems. "People of the state tend to be more conservative."

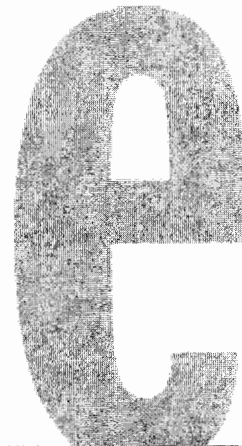
Chamber member Eric Britten from Anchorage said the issue can be boiled down to whether the capital should be in Juneau.

"If the Legislature has to approve a long-term lease with Juneau, the Legislature will interpret it as an agreement that Juneau should be where the capitol resides," said Britten, manager of ocean carrier Horizon Lines. He said he feels torn about the capital-move issue but believes no matter where the capital is, it should be more easily accessible than Juneau is now.

Chamber member Ginger Stock-McKenzie, owner of a Fairbanks Web design firm, said she needs more



► Mayor Bruce Botelho



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information about the funding mechanism and the benefits of

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building a new capitol to determine whether she would support Botelho's project.

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"If the state decides to build a capitol, the state should build a road to Juneau," Stock-McKenzie said. "If the state decides to move the capital, I don't see the need to build a road."

Stock-McKenzie said she is prone to leaving the capital in Juneau at this stage.

"I like what the mayor said about Fairbanks being the educational center, Anchorage the economic center and Juneau the political center," she said.

The dubious responses are typical, as Botelho said in his presentation.

Botelho said people who oppose the new capitol can be divided into four categories - those who think the current building is good enough; those who say Juneau can build it but don't want to spend public money on it; those who don't think the state should build it unless they can drive to it; and those who say the state should build it somewhere else.

A fifth category was added after the release of the designs: Those who didn't care for any of the four concepts.

"I think it's fair to say that one could hear the collective air sucked out of the room," Botelho said. "These concepts turn our concepts of what we think a capitol should look like upside down. People say they don't look Alaskan but that raises the question: What does look Alaskan?"

Botelho stressed that none of these design concepts will be the capitol.

"The real design of the capitol begins once we have selected the team we believe is most capable of doing the job," Botelho said. "This is not the end product. This is the beginning of the dialogue."

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