

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN RE:

**PETITION FOR RELOCATION OF
MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT COURT 31-1-02
OUTSIDE OF ITS BOUNDARIES**

NO. _____

PETITION FOR RELOCATION OF MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT COURT 31-1-02

The 31st Judicial District of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (Lehigh County), by and through its President Judge, Edward D. Reibman, hereby petitions your Honorable Court pursuant to Pa.R.C.P.M.D.J. No. 101 for approval to relocate the office, chambers and courtroom of Magisterial District Court 31-1-02 outside of its boundaries to a shared location with Magisterial District Court 31-2-01 at the Old Lehigh County Courthouse (“Old Courthouse”), 501 West Hamilton Street, Allentown, Pennsylvania, upon the completion of renovations to the Old Courthouse, and assigns as reasons the following:

1. The 31st Judicial District comprises Lehigh County, Pennsylvania. Lehigh County is a 3rd Class County in the southeastern section of Pennsylvania. Per the 2010 United States census the population of Lehigh County was 349,947. Lehigh County is served by 14 Magisterial District Judges. As of 2019, the Lehigh County Magisterial District Court caseload totaled 79,937 cases.
2. The City of Allentown is the County Seat of Lehigh County. Allentown is the 3rd largest city in Pennsylvania behind Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Seven of the 14 Magisterial District Courts in Lehigh County, including Magisterial District Courts 31-1-02 and 31-2-01, are situated within the boundaries of the City of Allentown.
3. As reflected by Exhibit A, the boundaries of Magisterial District Courts 31-1-02 and 31-2-01 are adjacent to each other.

4. Magisterial District Court 31-1-02 is currently located at 1101 West Hamilton Street, Allentown, Pennsylvania 18101. The proposed location for Magisterial District Court 31-1-02 is the Old Courthouse, which is located at 501 West Hamilton Street, Allentown, Pennsylvania 18101, a distance of 0.2 mile from the boundary of Magisterial Court 31-1-02, and 0.7 mile, or six (6) city blocks, from its current location.
5. Prior to March 2020, when the Old Courthouse was temporarily vacated pending completion of extensive renovations, the Old Courthouse housed the office, chambers and courtroom of Magisterial District Court 31-2-01 as well as the offices, chambers and courtrooms for two Common Pleas Judges. The Old Courthouse is located directly across the street from Lehigh County's main courthouse.
6. The renovations of the Old Courthouse are being done to optimize space; increase safety and security; improve the building's systems and accessibility for the public and law enforcement; and reduce overall costs to Lehigh County. The architectural design proposed for the renovations include space to house offices, chambers and courtrooms for two Magisterial District Courts on the First Floor of the Old Courthouse. Exhibit B represents the proposed layout of the First Floor of the building. Upper levels of the building will house the offices, chambers and courtrooms for two Common Pleas Judges.
7. Exhibit C reflects a closer view of the proposed layout of the offices, chambers and courtrooms for the two Magisterial District Courts, identified as Court #1 and Court #2. Each Magisterial District Judge will have separate courtrooms, waiting areas, entrances, staff/staff areas, storage and chambers. The only shared areas would be hallways, break area and public restrooms, also identified on Exhibit C. Additional restrooms for staff and the Magisterial District Judges would be located on the lower floor of the building that would not be accessible to the public.

8. Magisterial District Court 31-1-02 currently consists of 4500 square feet of rented space allocated as follows: 180 square feet for chambers, 430 square feet for the courtroom, 200 square feet for the waiting area, and approximately 800 square feet for the staff area. The remainder of the square footage is storage.
9. The proposed location for Magisterial District Court 31-1-02 at the Old Courthouse (identified as "Court #2" on Exhibit C) would consist of 2100 square feet excluding common areas, public hallways/restrooms, basement storage and basement restrooms, consisting of the following: 270 square feet for chambers, 485 square feet for the courtroom, 400 square feet for the waiting area, and 620 square feet for the staff area. Storage at the proposed location would include 210 square feet of in-office storage with additional storage located in the basement.
10. The proposed square footage and layout for Magisterial District Court 31-1-02 in the Old Courthouse are more evenly distributed and provide more spacious public areas than in Magisterial District Court 31-1-02's current location. The proposed location of Magisterial District Court 31-1-02 meets the specifications recommended in the Magisterial District Court Facility, Equipment & Security Guidelines issued by the AOPC in April 2016. (Six staff members are employed at Magisterial District Court 31-1-02.)
11. The proposed location would provide additional security for Magisterial District Court 31-1-02. Lehigh County Sheriff's deputies screen all persons entering the Old Courthouse with a magnetometer. In addition, monitoring cameras and panic alarms are strategically placed throughout the Old Courthouse and the Sheriff's deputies do random rounds in the building to ensure the safety and security of all staff and the public. No such security is provided at Magisterial District Court 31-1-02's current location. Relocating Magisterial District Court 31-1-02 to the Old Courthouse will enable it to benefit from the extensive security provided at the Old Courthouse as well as decrease the response time to any emergent situation.

12. As reflected on Exhibit D, the Old Courthouse is 0.1 mile from the headquarters of the Allentown Police Department, which is 0.2 mile closer to the headquarters of the Allentown Police Department than Magisterial District Court 31-1-02's current location.
13. Because Magisterial District Court 31-2-01 has been located at the Old Courthouse and will return to it upon the completion of its renovations, the proposed location for Magisterial District Court 31-1-02 is already well known to the public, law enforcement, attorneys and the public as a Magisterial District Court and will be easy to inform and educate the public as to the new location.
14. Although located in the same building, Magistrate District Courts 31-1-02 and 31-2-01 will remain separate and distinct from each other. There will be ample directional signage to eliminate any public confusion.
15. As reflected on Exhibit E, parking within a 2-3 block radius of Magisterial District Court 31-1-02's existing location is limited, consisting of some street parking and three flat lots. There are seven multi-level parking garages within 0.2 mile from the Old Courthouse as well as street parking and access to public transportation at the Old Courthouse.
16. Magisterial District Court 31-1-02 is currently situated in a leased facility for which Lehigh County pays a rental fee of approximately \$73,900 per year, which increases at the rate of 2% a year thereafter, and contracts with an outside vendor for janitorial services. Since the Old Courthouse is a county-owned facility, there will be no rental or janitorial expenses to house Magisterial District Court 31-1-02 in the Old Courthouse. In addition, the Old Courthouse already provides Sheriff's deputies for security, thus enhancing security available to Magisterial District Court 31-1-02 in the Old Courthouse without the necessity of paying for the cost of a deputy Sheriff at an average salary of \$43,700, exclusive of health coverage and other benefits, if a deputy was to be provided at Magisterial District Court 31-1-02's current location.

17. At least thirty (30) days written notice of the proposed relocation of Magisterial District Court 31-1-02 to the Old Courthouse, in the form attached to this Petition as Exhibit F, has been provided to the Executive, Commissioners, District Attorney, and Public Defender of Lehigh County; each Magisterial District Judge of the 31st Judicial District; the Mayor and Chief of Police of the City of Allentown; and the Executive Director of the Bar Association of Lehigh County. Such notice was also published in The Morning Call, a newspaper of general circulation in Lehigh County, and posted on the website of the Court of Common Pleas of the 31st Judicial District (Lehigh County) at www.lcccp.org and of the County of Lehigh at www.lehighcounty.org.
18. Attached as Exhibit G are all true and correct copies of all written responses received to the aforesaid Notice.
19. For all of the reasons set forth above, the proposed relocation of Magisterial District Court 31-1-02 from its present location at 1101 West Hamilton Street, Allentown, Pennsylvania, to the Old Lehigh County Courthouse located at 501 West Hamilton Street, Allentown, Pennsylvania, is more suitable and affordable than the facilities that are available within the boundaries of Magisterial District Court 31-1-02.

Wherefore, the Court of Common Pleas of the 31st Judicial District (Lehigh County), by and through its President Judge, Edward D. Reibman, hereby requests your Honorable Court grant this Petition and allow the relocation of Magisterial District Court 31-1-02 to the Old Lehigh County Courthouse at 501 West Hamilton Street, Allentown, Pennsylvania 18101.

Respectfully submitted,

Edward D. Reibman, President Judge
31st Judicial District

EXHIBIT A

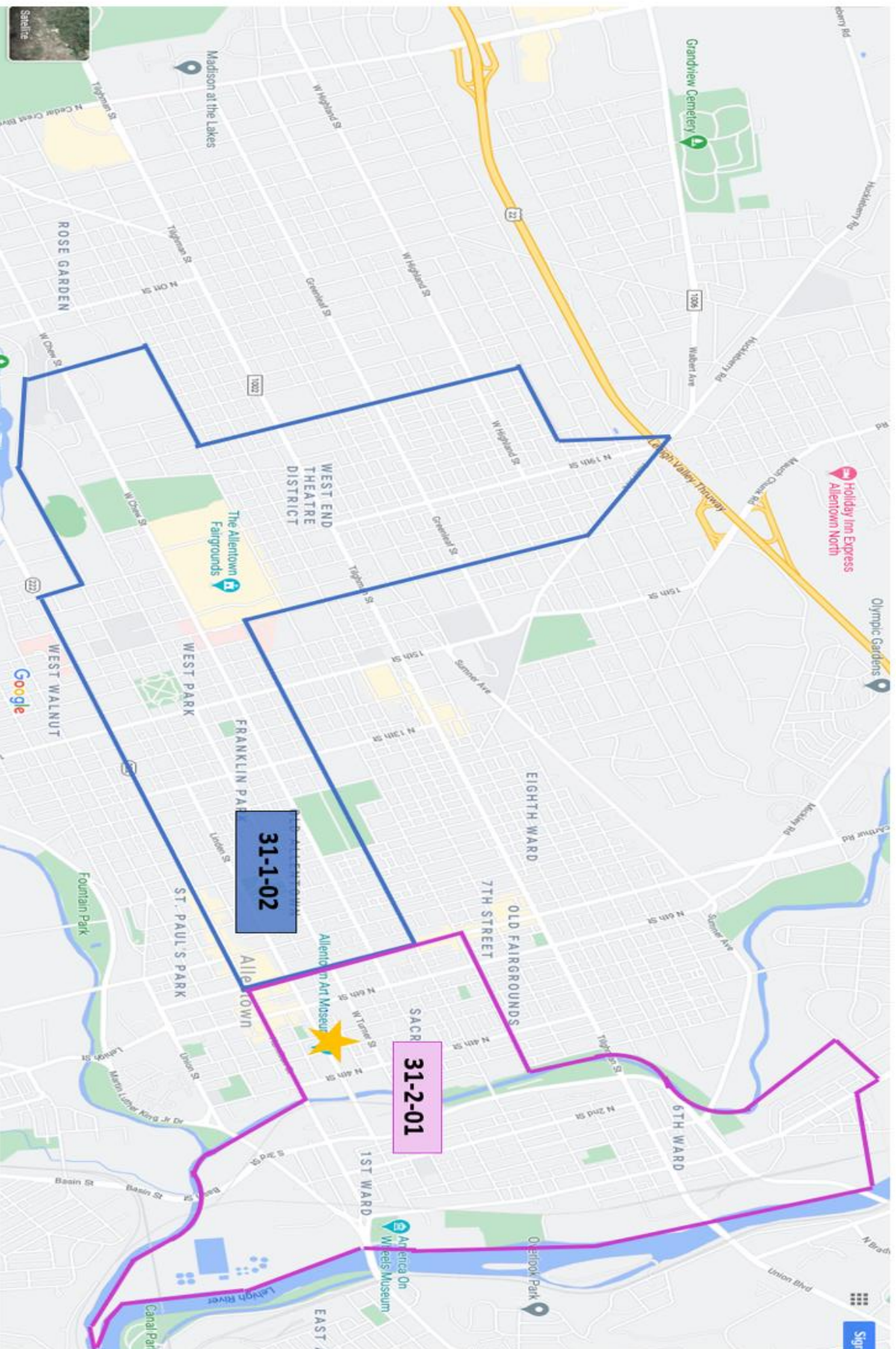


EXHIBIT B

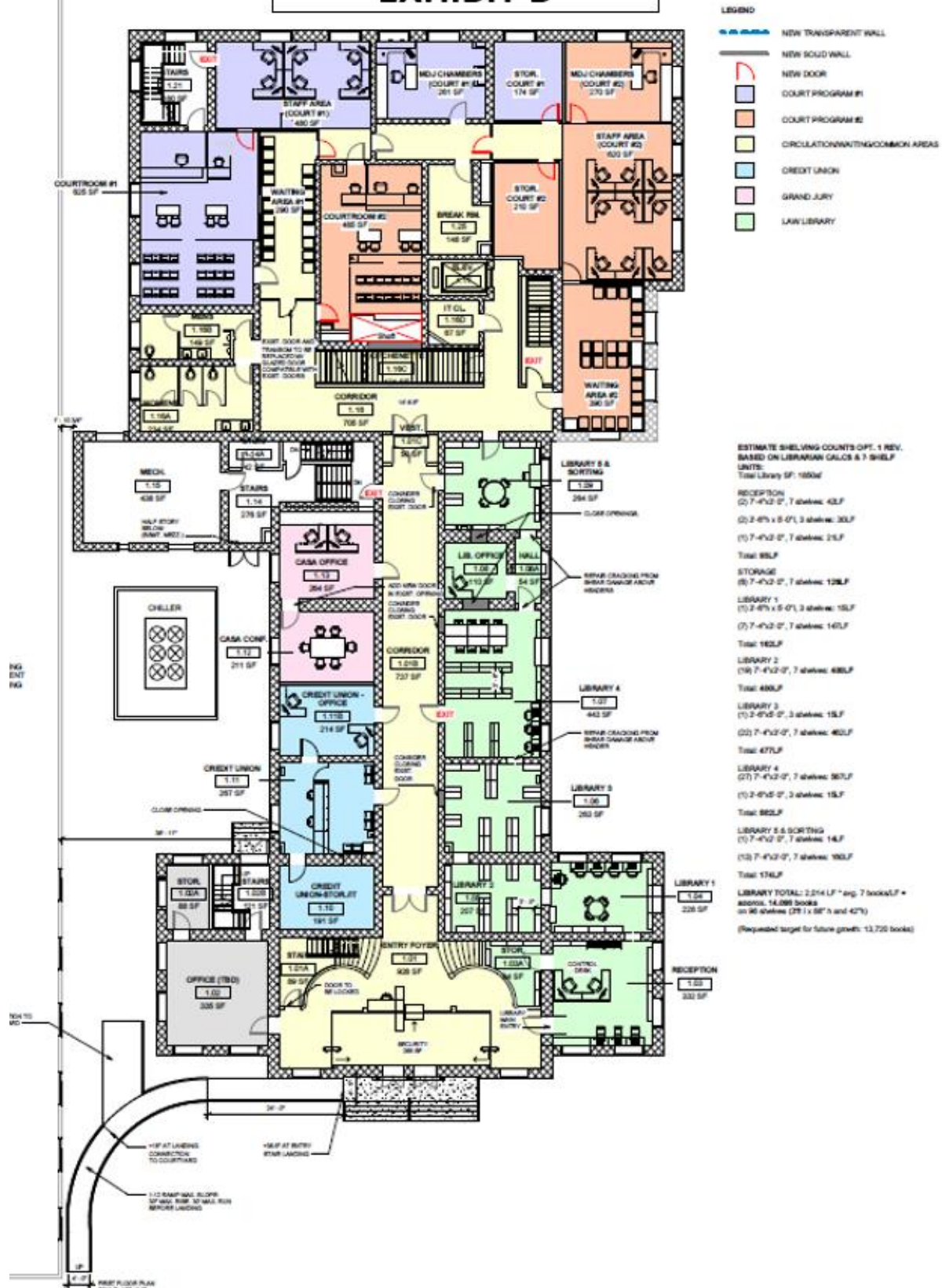


EXHIBIT C

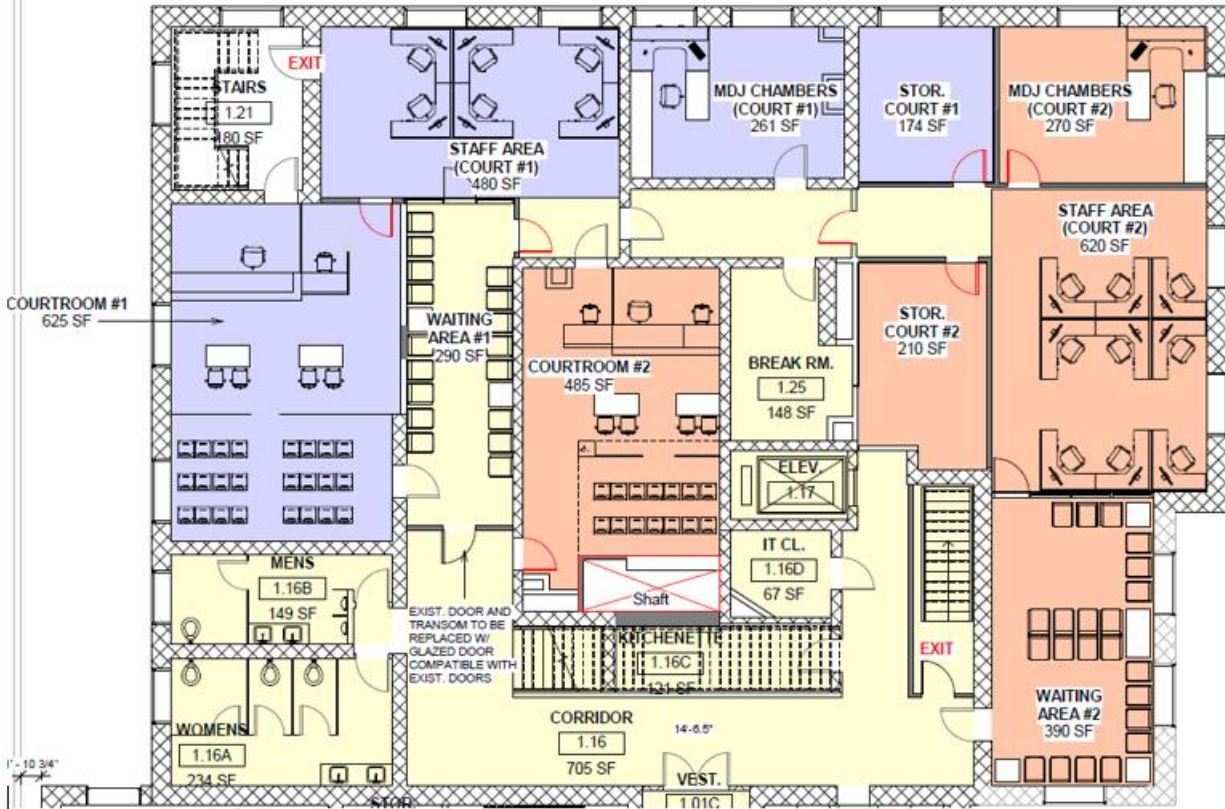


EXHIBIT D

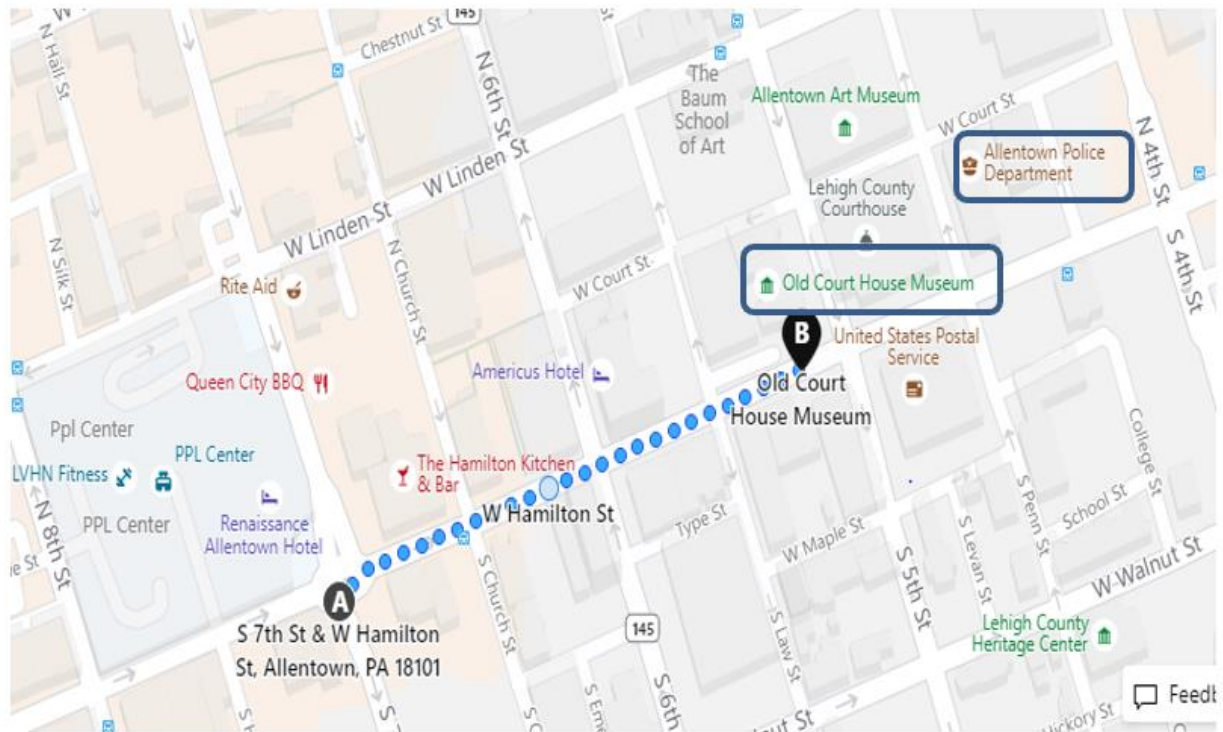


EXHIBIT E

