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A Message from the Dean

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A message from Dean Caminker

“Measure twice, cut once.” While this is perhaps not the most well-known of proverbs, it’s precisely what we do as lawyers. We view a problem from all sides and perspectives, we anticipate every possible argument and counter-argument, and we develop a nuanced strategy for trial or negotiation before we embark on a course of action.

So it should come as no surprise that we at Michigan Law heeded the sage counsel of this proverb when it came to moving forward on our building expansion project. To be sure, the Quad is architecturally grand and inspiring, but its 80-year-old interior spaces demand rejuvenation and enhancement to underscore our position as a truly world class law school. As you may recall, we have a broadly acknowledged and increasingly compelling need for more and different kinds of space, including

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modern classrooms and seminar rooms, a student gathering place, faculty offices, clinical law student and faculty space, student study areas, and other uses. In the School’s initial attempt to meet these space needs, we consulted with architect Renzo Piano with the idea of building an addition to the Law Quadrangle contained within the block where it currently stands. Piano’s concept (previously featured in *Law Quadrangle*

Notes), a distinguished 170,000-square-foot expansion featuring a glass-roofed piazza, would have met most of our space needs in a most elegant manner. Unfortunately, it also would have required a financial investment that was sobering even at that time, \$135 million, and which has since ballooned via construction cost increases to over \$175 million, with further significant annual increases in the offing. This was clearly stretching the School’s capacity, notwithstanding the support of many generous alumni and friends who have already invested in the building expansion.

Cost alone encouraged us to measure twice before committing to such an expensive project, but we also reexamined a number of other, critically important factors. One was an expected six-year construction cycle, which presented three separate problems.

First, we couldn’t so much as break ground for the project until a significant portion of the funding was in hand, which would have left our current space needs unaddressed for quite some time. Second, a lengthy construction cycle would have been disruptive to students, faculty, and staff for intolerably long periods. Particularly in today’s highly competitive admissions environment, I didn’t want three or more incoming classes to experience the Quad only while its beauty was obscured by functionally limiting and unsightly construction projects. And third, since

the designed structure would have partly been built on top of the underground library and would also have required gutting heavily-used areas such as the part of our basement dedicated to student organizations, many important components of the current buildings would have been off-limits for extended periods of time. With our Library ranked among the best in the world and our student organizations among the most active anywhere, effectively shutting down those and other operations for months at a time would have seriously compromised the quality and integrity of the Michigan Law experience.

Just as important as the difficult construction schedule was the issue of opportunity costs and competing priorities. Our stature as a world-class law school is heavily dependent on attracting and retaining prominent faculty and qualified staff, providing financial aid to talented and deserving applicants, and developing resources so we can seek out and pursue exciting and fruitful teaching and service opportunities. With the lion’s share of our financial resources directed toward a new building, it would not be possible to address these other vitally important priorities in a way befitting the University of Michigan Law School. That, I felt strongly, was not an acceptable option.

Finally, we also took time to consider the way in which the University is changing around us even as I write this message. The Law School is no longer the southern gateway to the academic campus; that distinction now belongs to the newly-built home of the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, one block

south of us at the corner of State and Hill Streets. And with the expansion of the University's frontier once again, as has happened throughout the history of this great institution, new site options have opened for new building. In particular, the construction of the Ford School on the far side of the block to the south presents a rare—and fleeting—opportunity to reserve space for the Law School beyond the Quad, and the School is poised to take advantage of that opportunity. Given that we don't know what our future needs may be, or how being landlocked and space-constrained could impact us over the next century, I cannot in good conscience forgo the chance we have now to expand our physical horizon. And beyond opportunities for expansion, new adjacencies open up new pedagogical possibilities, including collaborations with the Ford School and our other near neighbor, the Stephen M. Ross School of Business. Such partnerships would add terrific value to the experience of both students and faculty, and I know many join me in finding these prospects tremendously exciting.

I am therefore deeply grateful that our Building Committee, under the able and farsighted leadership of Rebecca Eisenberg, the Robert and Barbara Luciano Professor of Law, has helped me to wrestle with these issues, interact with all relevant constituencies, and provide guidance in moving forward. We have revisited our initial objectives and assumptions, examined how those objectives had evolved in the intervening years, and ultimately arrived at what I believe are achievable ways

of having a profound impact on the School and the very special educational experience we offer. And we remain well aware that moving ahead expeditiously is critical to our future.

The point worth stressing is that, however many times we looked at the evidence, our conclusions were the same: the original plan's costs had skyrocketed, other high priority objectives also needed to be pursued, the six-year and intrusive construction period was sobering, and the University's expansion offered marvelous potential for new locational options, academic partnerships, and future growth. All of this inclined us toward developing an alternative.

To that end, with our guidance the University recently retained the services of Hartman-Cox Architects of Washington, D.C., to work with us on preliminary services en route to a new building expansion plan for Michigan Law. That was an inspired choice from my perspective. Hartman-Cox boasts an outstanding reputation. The firm is well-versed in academic architecture, including law schools (Georgetown, Washington University, and Tulane among others). And by virtue of personality and relative proximity, I'm confident they'll prove wonderful partners. I encourage you to take a look at their work by visiting www.hartmancox.com.

Next steps? Once the Building Committee fully briefs Hartman-Cox and the firm develops basic conceptual options, we'll seek approval from the University's Board of Regents to continue with the project and



commence actual design work. At this point, I can't speculate about cost and timetable except to emphasize that whatever we do will be done within our means and completed in the soonest possible time.

I can, however, assure you that the Law School will continue to update you as we proceed to design and execute a beautiful renovation and expansion that will both complement the Quad and reflect our stature as a world-class law school. In the meantime, as concerns the building project, I am optimistic that we have formally exchanged our tape measure for a set of finely-honed shears.

Evan Caminker