

Federal courthouse targeted for closure

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The Beaufort Federal Courthouse topped a list of federal court facilities that could be closed to reduce costs, according to documents obtained by The Associated Press.

The documents show 60 federal court sites in 29 states — many located in small, rural communities — could be on the chopping block after being identified and ranked by federal court officials for possible closure based on a variety of categories, including cost, usage and location, according to the AP.

The courthouse in Beaufort, a 19th



Beaufort Federal Courthouse

century building on Bay Street that became a federal courthouse in 1994 after serving for years as the county's

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Forget the blue ribbon pie. A Hilton Head Island grader won a \$35,000 prize for creating a specialty sandwich. Mallory Russell, 8, turned her favorite foods — “Thai, Mexican of course, peanut butter” — into a creation in creating her Peanut Butter Chicken Quesadilla. The 8-year-old won the grand prize in the 11th JIF Most Creative Peanut Butter Sandwich Contest in New York City. The winning sandwich was made of cheddar cheese, vegetable and chicken. The quesadilla is smeared with peanut butter, barbecue sauce and lime juice. The prize money is earmarked for college, and her father, Ch...

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courthouse, was ranked No. 1 on that list, followed by the federal court site in Parkersburg, W.Va., and another in Harrison, Ark.

Beaufort's federal courthouse has been largely inactive for several years, sending most local federal cases to be tried before judges in Charleston, according to city and county officials. It was unknown Thursday how many full-time employees work at the facility.

The 60 sites being considered for closure do not have a resident judge, said David Sellers, a federal courts spokesman. Instead, judges based in larger cities travel to these smaller locations when necessary.

“The federal judiciary is going through an aggressive cost-containment effort because the money Congress has provided for the operating expenses for the courts has been essentially frozen the last three years,” Sellers said in an email to the AP.

Sellers told the AP a signifi-

cant portion of those funds pay rent for federal court facilities and pointed out that the court system is at the beginning of the process of reviewing which courthouse facilities could close.

Beaufort County administrator Gary Kubic said county officials are aware the courthouse, which it owns, is targeted for closure. County Council members plan to tour the facility Monday.

“We want to familiarize ourselves and council with the courthouse because we may end up with the facility,” Kubic said. “If that does occur, we have to begin considering what we would do with it. It is a beautiful building that has a very specific use.”

The Department of Justice signed a 20-year lease with the county in 1991 and opted last year to extend the agreement another five years, Kubic said.

Kubic said the county receives \$240,000 a year from the Justice Department to pay for \$4.86 million in recently completed interior renovations.

Beaufort Mayor Billy Key-

serling said he is convinced the courthouse will not fall into disrepair if surrendered by the federal government.

“The DOJ has paid for the incredible renovations to the building, and it is an absolutely gorgeous building,” Keyserling said. “... I feel confident that it will remain in public use. The good news is that the county owns it, and the federal government paid to restore it.”

The building stands on the site of Barnwell's Castle, a three-story, pre-Revolutionary War tabby home that burned in 1881, according to historians Alexia Jones Helsley and Lawrence Rowland. The courthouse was rebuilt in 1884, and its exterior was last renovated in 1936.

The Judicial Conference of the United States, the policy-making body for the federal courts, will decide whether to close any of the court sites at a meeting in September.

The Associated Press contributed to this report. Follow reporter Patrick Donohue at twitter.com/ProtectServeBft.