

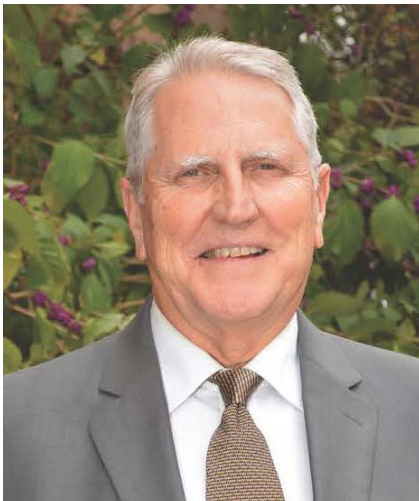


STATE OF TEXAS CAPITOL COMPLEX PROJECT PHASE II



Texas Capitol Complex Update

Progress updates on the Capitol Complex Project | July 2024



John Raff, TFC Deputy Executive Director, Retires

40 Years of Creating Places That People Enjoy

When Deputy Executive Director John Raff joined the Texas Facilities Commission (TFC) in 2005, the agency oversaw less than \$400 million in projects annually with a small team of registered architects and engineers. Today, the 400+ employees of TFC manage a \$4.4 billion construction portfolio. John is retiring this year after a remarkable career spanning over forty years in structural engineering and executive leadership. We recently

had the privilege of sitting down with John to gather his insights on his years of service and the transformation of the Texas Facilities Commission over the last two decades.

Austin Born and Raised

John is a true Austinite. He is a proud graduate of Lanier High School (now Navarro Early College High School) and The University of Texas at Austin, where he earned his degree in structural engineering. Fresh out of college, John sought positions with long-span structural specialists. He landed a position with Walter P Moore in Houston but soon missed Austin, and after less than a year, he took a position with Austin-based structural engineering consultant Stoeltje and Associates, Inc. Over the next three years, John honed his skills before accepting a position with the Austin office of Jaster Quintanilla in 1985.

During his twenty-year tenure with Jaster Quintanilla, John provided structural engineering services for several Austin landmark projects, including the Palmer Event Center, the Bullock Star at the Bullock Texas State History Museum, The University of Texas at Austin Microbiology Wet Lab, and the Student Health Center.

After years of working as a structural engineering consultant for commercial and public facilities, John sought a new challenge. In 2005, he joined the Texas Facilities Commission (then known as the Texas Building and Procurement Commission) as a resident structural engineer.

“A structural engineer is a technical specialist,” explained John. “I was ready to try project management and work on the owner’s side of the table.”

The Evolution of the Texas Facilities Commission

When John arrived at TFC, the agency had just finished its first portfolio assessment, and the largest project was the \$100 million expansion of the [Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired \(TSBVI\)](#).

As John describes it, the agency’s focus at this time was purchasing.



John in 2004, a year before he joined TFC.

“The agency executed capital projects and provided maintenance and operations. We did not have a strategic plan. The closest thing to strategic planning was The Texas General Land Office’s review of the State portfolio every two years to determine if any properties would be eliminated. We were missing a growth plan.”

Deferred Maintenance Program

By 2007, the Agency budget had shrunk to \$190 million. As part of the State’s balanced budget requirements, TFC had to analyze budget cuts and how these would impact operations. There was a lot of scrutiny on the base budget to ensure it did not

increase. However, this goal was at odds with rising utility costs and the need for a facility maintenance plan for existing properties.

“There is a large price tag associated with the maintenance and modernization of buildings,” said John. “Utilities are forty percent of our budget. You can’t cut utilities, so budget cuts always impact maintenance and modernization programs. Building users often don’t notice maintenance efforts unless something goes wrong. The downside of performing maintenance is that budgeting for these unseen improvements can be undervalued.”

To address the maintenance budget dilemma, TFC developed a deferred maintenance program and master facility plan. The plan required TFC staff to collect data from many sources to understand and prioritize maintenance needs and create projects funded through capital appropriations.

“The Deferred Maintenance Program changed how we present our budget for legislative approval,” John explains. “We collect a lot of data to ensure we only ask for the funds needed. We are always reprioritizing to address the most urgent needs.” This program established the benchmark for facility management by systematically documenting the conditions of the Agency’s building portfolio.

Maintenance and Renewal Program

The establishment of the Maintenance and Renewal Program (MRP), approved by the legislature in 2023, has further enhanced the maintenance and modernization of state facilities. Many State buildings are over fifty years old. Through MRP, funding is now available to modernize workspaces, finishes, and fixtures to create attractive work environments for conducting State business.

John is proud of leading this new effort and appreciates the firms that bring their expertise to complete the maintenance and modernization projects.

“We perform construction and maintenance projects in fully occupied buildings and work around the hectic legislative sessions and other busy seasons. It is important and delicate work that requires thorough coordination with many entities,” said John. “Through the efforts of TFC staff and the support of the legislature, the Maintenance and Renewal Program has moved the needle on better maintenance of our State’s assets. Our management culture focuses on creating modern spaces that attract a high-quality workforce.”

Notable Projects

The Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired and Texas School for the Deaf Campus - Austin, Texas



Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Under John’s leadership, the [Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired \(TSBVI\)](#) and the [Texas School for the Deaf \(TSD\)](#) have both undergone significant facility improvements.

In 2010, the Texas Legislature passed an initiative making TFC the maintenance arm for both schools. Before this initiative, each school managed its own maintenance.

From 2010 through 2012, John served as the project manager for the \$104 million campus renovation of the TSBVI. Almost every building on the campus was rebuilt. Construction included a new elementary school, an education building for sixth grade and up, a natatorium, an administrative building, and a

warehouse and maintenance facility. Fabric shade structures were added to shelter walkways, accenting the architecture and campus layout.

Through the close collaboration of school administrators and TFC, the project created a beautiful, modern campus that continues to help the school fulfill its mission to help all Texas students who are blind, visually impaired, or deafblind be empowered to lead productive and fulfilling lives.

While renovation work was underway at the TSBVI, TFC worked with the staff of the TSD to build a new maintenance program. The existing facility team members became TFC employees. Changing reporting structures and maintenance practices required a cultural change that took time for the school to accept. However, TFC’s service-minded approach brought a consistency in maintenance that the school came to embrace.



Texas School for the Deaf

In 2017, TFC helped the TSD develop a new ten-year master plan to address future enrollment needs. The master plan has led to multiple renovations and maintenance improvements, a career and technical education center expansion for culinary arts, and campus circulation improvements. In 2022, the school

opened a new 25,000-square-foot Administration building and Early Learning Center, which serves as the new gateway to the campus.

The strong relationships that TFC has built with the TSBVI and TSD hold special meaning for John.

“These schools do important work to enrich the lives of Texas children. I am proud that TFC can support the schools in achieving their missions.”

The North Austin Complex



The North Austin Complex is located on state-owned land between 45th Street and 51st Street along North Lamar Boulevard. The complex serves as headquarters for the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) and its enterprise programs.

TFC, working on behalf of and collaborating with HHSC, prepared a North Austin Complex Master Plan to consolidate certain HHSC programs from leased office space into state-owned buildings.

The nine-story, 406,000-square-foot office building was completed in 2021 and includes an adjacent seven-story parking garage for approximately 1,850 cars. The new building provides efficient, modern office space for 1,500 HHSC staff, saving the State \$8 million in annual leasing costs.

John remembers the project as an outstanding construction experience. “That project went so smoothly. [Vaughn Construction](#) was a great construction partner.”

The Capitol Complex Project, Phase I and II - Austin, Texas



Capitol Complex Project - Phase I

The Capitol Complex Project is the largest project ever undertaken by TFC. The project’s purpose is to consolidate State offices into the Capitol Complex and reduce the cost of leased office space. Consolidating these offices will create operational efficiencies between and within agencies, provide visitors with easier access to agency offices, and reduce leased space costs for State agencies.

Phase I of the Capitol Complex Project was completed in 2022. The project included the construction of two new office buildings totaling more than one million square feet, 2,000+ above and below-ground parking spaces for State employees, a new central utility plant, and three city blocks of the Texas Capitol Mall between Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and 16th Street. The massive project required the excavation of three city blocks, requiring extensive logistics planning and utility relocation efforts. In addition, construction on the project happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, which required extreme workforce protection efforts and overcoming supply chain issues.

“When I started in construction, every time it rained, the job site shut down, and no one got paid,”

John said. “During the pandemic, the Phase I team strictly implemented all TFC safety guidelines, doing everything possible to keep people safe, keep them working, and keep them paid.”

John has deep gratitude for everyone who worked to make Phase I such a success.

“I stand on the shoulders of many competent people, including our staff and consultant partners. TFC Project Managers Keith Hall and Janie Gribble, both seasoned architects, were the forces that drove the success,” said John. “Nothing rattled [Page](#) (Master Architect/Engineer) or [Balfour Beatty](#) (Construction Manager Agent). They just worked to find solutions. It took a village, and I saw my role as the interface between the village, the commissioners, and the public.”



Capitol Complex Project - Phase II

Phase II of the Capitol Complex Project includes two additional State office buildings and the final city block of the Texas Capitol Mall and Underground Parking Garage. The first office building will be constructed at 1501 Lavaca, City Block 39. The 360,000-square-foot building will be eight stories tall. The second office building will be constructed at 1500 Congress on City Block 46. This 165,000-square-foot building will be five stories tall. The exteriors will portray a dignified but modern combination of sunset red granite and glass curtain wall, bringing healthy natural light into the space. Both buildings will have onsite parking for State employees.

John looks forward to seeing the Phase II construction rise from the ground.

“I love the renderings,” said John. “We have taken amenities and outdoor community space to another level. I have also enjoyed the poetic analogies of the design themes, such as comparing the design of 1501 Lavaca to a bi-level river. You enter on the upper level, and the building flows like a river into the lower-level common spaces.”

The Texas Border Wall Project



Through an emergency declaration from the Governor’s office activating Operation Lone Star, TFC is tasked with building a wall along Texas’ southern border. This construction program includes building permanent new wall infrastructure in remote and extremely difficult and varied terrain. TFC engaged [Broadus](#) to help plan the project and the team of [Michael Baker](#)/[Huitt Zollars](#) is serving as the program manager.

The team has worked closely with landowners to establish perpetual easements for the wall while respecting and preserving the use of the adjacent land. Accommodations such as the positioning of gates and access to water have been addressed based on the needs of the individual owners. This historic and intensive engineering program has benefited from John’s expertise.

Building the TFC Team

John has worked with seven executive directors during his tenure at TFC, including John’s term as Interim Executive Director from 2017 to 2018. Executive

directors have extensive credentials, and John has learned from each of them. He has especially enjoyed his partnership with current Executive Director [Mike Novak](#).



John and Mike at a Safety Week celebration on Phase I of the Capitol Complex Project.

“Mike was a former county commissioner. He understands the role of TFC and how the agency supports the State’s work to serve the citizens of Texas,” John explained.

Mike and John have transformed TFC into a construction and development agency focused on modern infrastructure with a strategic plan to maximize the life of State facilities. John appreciates the efforts of the TFC team in embracing this transformation.

John’s motto has always been, “Have a big impact on people and a small impact on the earth.” His goal as a leader has been to inspire his team to do their best and give them space to try new things, even if they stumble.

“As Deputy Executive Director of TFC, I have always endeavored to be patiently vigilant. There are many necessary gates in State government. We always think about the process and look for ways to improve. However, sometimes, we must give the process time to work. I have focused on being a good protector of my employees, making it clear that the buck stops at my desk with the understanding that I will work with my team to find good solutions.”

John’s favorite thing about TFC is the real sense of community.

“I love coming into the office and hearing laughter in the hallways. We work as a team, with everyone rowing in the same direction. The respect we have for one another helps us overcome every challenge.”

John told us that his retirement plan is to spend time with family and friends and do whatever he wants whenever he wants. After a career of strategic planning, the spontaneity of this plan sounds perfect. We appreciate John’s service to TFC and the State of Texas and wish him a wonderful retirement.

“I love coming into the office and hearing laughter in the hallways. We work as a team, with everyone rowing in the same direction. The respect we have for one another helps us overcome every challenge.”

John Raff
Deputy Executive Director



John at the ribbon cutting ceremony for the Central Utility Plant.



John speaking at the celebration for the completion of the Texas Capitol Mall, Phase I.



John and former TFC Chairman Steven Alvis attend a ceremony at TSD.



John cooks for TFC Employee Appreciation luncheon.

*Congratulations
on your
retirement, John!*



Thank you for your service.