

The Lane County Courthouse was constructed in 1959. In the 60 years since, while the courthouse has served the needs of the community, it has aged and can not only no longer handle the workload of the courts but also cannot function adequately, according to a panel of County officials at the February 21 Springfield City Club Meeting. County Administrator Steve Mokrohisky, Commissioner Joe Berney, Judge Jay McAlpin, and Chief Sheriff's Deputy Cliff Harrold outlined the many issues facing the courthouse structure.



When the building was built, it held five courtrooms; now there are 15. The population of Lane County was one-third of today's, and the workload of the Circuit Court was commensurately smaller. Now there are significant security problems – little or no separation between individuals in custody and the public, no opportunities to provide separate spaces for civil litigants, no private spaces for attorney client consultations, and so on. Some court functions, like the law library, and Jury Assembly have been moved into the neighboring Public Service Building. Other

services like the Public Defender, and Pardon and Parole, must be housed elsewhere.

In addition, the building's infrastructure is aged and failing. Frequent elevator shortages delay the work of the courts, many spaces are not accessible to persons with disabilities, there are failures in the sewage system, the heating and air conditioning system, even the plumbing.

Not only has the need for court space grown in the 50 years since the Lane County Courthouse was built, but also the nature of how justice is administered has changed dramatically. Judge McAlpin noted that when the first state government official was appointed – a judge – the purpose of the court was to simply decide disputes, who owned a piece of property, who owed another money. In the 21st Century administration of justice has become much more complex. Now there are four separate and additional courts – a drug court, a youth drug court, a mental health court and a veteran's court. Each of these is designed to not simply litigate disputes, but to solve the underlying problems. This, he noted is a much more complex and time-consuming task, requiring facilities different from those available in the current Courthouse.

County Commissioners have concluded that it is essential to remedy these failures, and that rehabilitation of the current building will not suffice. Their conclusion: the current courthouse would be replaced by a new courthouse on the block which used to house the Eugene City Hall. The Public Service Building would not be replaced, although some Court facilities – jury assembly and the law library -- would be moved from the PSB to a new seven story courthouse which would house the courts, the sheriff's office, the public defender, and the district attorney as well as pardon and parole.

The 16 courtrooms would be flexible so that they could handle regular trials as well as the custom courts. They would be designed around a secure core, where a separate area for in custody persons can be kept secure from the public. Space would be made available for the court functions that are housed elsewhere. The current concept calls for a 100 year construction life, and at least a 50 year useful life.

Mr. Mokrohisky both the decision to construct rather than rehabilitate and the timing of moving ahead now with the current Courthouse proposal. He said the Legislature, in 2015, had created a special fund which will pay up to 50 percent of the state-related costs of a new courthouse. This fund was created after vigorous lobbying by Metro Portland legislators who wanted the Multnomah County courthouse replaced. Lane County decided to take advantage of the window created by this new revenue source and move before funding was reduced in the future. Since the land swap with the City of Eugene has closed, making the site available, the County believes it is prudent to move quickly.

Under the special fund rules, the construction must be for a new courthouse, not a renovation, and only the cost of the State-mandated functions will be covered. Thus, for the Lane County Courthouse, while the cost of court facilities could be eligible the cost of providing sheriff space and facilities is not. The current estimate of \$252 million is for all functions, and the maximum eligible amount for Lane County is estimated at \$94 million. Of that amount, \$6.4 million has been appropriated by the state. The balance of \$87.6 million is included in the Judicial budget proposal for the current biennium. The County believes it will be more likely that the appropriation survives the budget process if the County has firmed up the commitment to provide the local share.

That local share is now estimated at \$154 million, after \$4 million in federal funds have been identified. The 20-year bond for that amount would require debt service of \$0.27 per thousand. He said that would result in a tax increase of \$50.49 a year on the \$187 thousand median priced single-family home. Commissioner Berney said that the Board has adopted an ordinance which prohibits selling any approved bonds if the state money does not get appropriated. A questioner asked about that estimate of median price, since the typical price of a county home is much higher. Devon Ashbridge, Public Information Officer for the County, explained that the estimate is based on the assessed value of a home, not the real market value. Although the relationship between assessed value and market value varies considerably because of some of the requirements of Measure 5 and Measure 50, typically, she said assessed value is about 70 percent of market value.

The total estimated price does not include the additional cost of staffing and maintaining the facility. Commissioner Berney noted that many of the building systems, like heating and ventilation, are so outmoded that a new building would result in substantial cost savings for energy, among other things. Mr. Mokrohisky said that there would be no significant additions to staff as a result of the new Courthouse. The County Commissioners are also considering whether to provide for both real time auditing, to manage costs on a current basis, and an independent audit of project costs.