



NEWS RELEASE NR 78-09
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New Placerville Courthouse Receives Funding Authorization

San Francisco—Plans for a new courthouse in Placerville received formal approval to begin, with funding authorization today by the State Public Works Board (SPWB). This approval marks the official start of the courthouse construction project, which will be managed by the state Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC).

The Superior Court of El Dorado County currently provides services for the west slope of the county in two facilities in Placerville as well as one facility in Cameron Park. The Placerville Main Street Branch, a three-story building constructed in 1913, houses four courtrooms and is severely overcrowded. This facility serves criminal, family law, juvenile delinquency and dependency, and domestic violence caseloads. The court also occupies about 20 percent of the Placerville Building C Branch, located in the county government center. Building C houses court administration, criminal, traffic, and small claims divisions; it contains two courtrooms where one must be shared with the County Planning Commission.

Both Placerville buildings have severe functional and physical deficiencies, are seriously overcrowded, and do not meet current security standards. The Main Street courthouse lacks a jury assembly area, so prospective jurors wait in hallways and stairwells. This building has no holding cells for in-custody defendants. Building C has no security screening for one of its courtrooms, lacks separate hallways for in-custody defendants, and has two single-occupant holding cells that are frequently over capacity.

The proposed project would replace the two Placerville courthouses and consolidate operations in a modern, secure facility to handle most case types. It would house six courtrooms and would include space for a jury assembly room, a self-help center, administration, clerks, security operations and holding, and building support space in 87,642 square feet. The Cameron Park branch would remain open after the proposed new Placerville courthouse is completed.

“The condition of the facilities on the west end of our county creates volatile and potentially dangerous situations for court users and staff,” said Suzanne N. Kingsbury, Presiding Judge, Superior Court of El Dorado County. “At the Main Street building, adult and juvenile offenders in custody must be transported in public elevators up to the courtrooms. Prisoners are walked through hallways and lobbies used by the public. Two of our three courthouses are plagued with asbestos, mold, and water intrusions that cannot be remediated. The exteriors have deteriorated to the point that pieces have fallen to the ground, jeopardizing lives. Parking is woefully inadequate, requiring that jurors be transported to the courthouse by bus from a remote location. Additionally, having

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three court locations within less than 15 miles of one another does not allow for economic use of court staff and security personnel, which adds a strain to our severely reduced court budget.”

The proposed project, with an estimated total cost of \$89.4 million, is funded by Senate Bill 1407. It is ranked as a “critical need” by the Judicial Council, making it among the highest priority capital-outlay projects for the judicial branch of California. According to Chief Justice Ronald M. George, “Strengthening the physical foundation of our judicial system is more than a metaphor. Courthouses are as vital a part of California’s infrastructure as bridges, highways, and water systems. It is time to adequately fund this fundamental component of the infrastructure of our democracy. Public safety and the interests of 38 million Californians require it.”

SB 1407 was enacted by the state Legislature last year to provide up to \$5 billion in funding for 41 new and renovated court facilities using court user fees rather than the state’s General Fund. To initiate each SB 1407 project, the AOC seeks funding authorization from the Joint Legislative Budget Committee of the State Legislature as well as the SPWB. This initial funding approval enables the AOC to proceed with site selection and preliminary plans, which is the initial portion of architectural design.

These projects provide valuable economic stimulus in local communities—the Placerville project is estimated to create over 2,000 direct and indirect jobs as it progresses through design, construction, and completion. Expediting these projects enables the AOC to take advantage of a unique window of opportunity—afforded by the current recession—for reduced pricing on land, design, and construction. The Placerville project is scheduled for completion by 4th quarter 2014.

More information about the project:

www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/occm/projects_placerville.htm

More information about the AOC’s process for building courthouses in California:

www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/occm/building.htm

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