

Transcript for San Bernardino Courthouse Video - Public Meeting 10/29/09

The central San Bernardino courthouse downtown is a treasure. Built in 1928, it's listed on the National Register of Historic places. But the building simply wasn't designed for this century's needs, even with the addition tacked on in 1958.

These days as many as 112,000 people a month line up at this location alone to get through security. It is wet and chilly in the winter, and it sizzles over a hundred degrees in the summer. Once inside, the lines snake through jammed corridors, in a structure called one of the worst courthouses in the state.

Now and then deputies have to clear the hallway, a security precaution so they can safely escort an inmate into a courtroom. There are no separate passage ways.

Many of these folks come in person so they can settle traffic tickets.

Karen Enderson, Court District Mgr.: *"To pay online they have to have a credit card; a lot of our clientele do not have credit cards or checking accounts, so they come in with cash in hand to pay."*

The amount of business handled here is eye-popping.

Leanne Kozak: *"This is actually a light day in line for traffic court. But one day recently they had as many as 300 traffic trials; in one day!"*

The squeeze continues inside the courtrooms.

Monica Real-Ramos, Courtroom Clerk: *"It gets real crazy in here because we have a lot of people coming in and out of here. Most of the time 100 set on calendar and 30 walk ins in the morning, and like 60-up in the afternoon."*

Plus they summon about 1,400 potential jurors every week, so there's another crowd jockeying for space in the jury assembly room.

Mary Davis, Assistant CEO: *"We pride ourselves on customer service. But it gets real hard."*

To make matters worse, they're right in the middle of a two-year retrofit to make the building safe in earthquakes. So besides being crowded, it's dusty and very unpleasant.

Mary Davis, Assistant CEO: *"It's a real challenging environment."*

And take a look at the holding cells. This was the county jail in the old days. They don't make these gears and pulleys anymore, so repairs require expensive special fabrication.

Eventually the historic courthouse will be used only for civil matters – so fewer people will congregate.

Tressa Kentner, San Bernardino CEO: *"It's going to be reused in a much smaller capacity and that allows us to make it a better courthouse."*

Directly across the street, there's a 7-acre lot that the city of San Bernardino has donated for the new courthouse. The mayor says the community is very excited.

Hon. Pat Morris, San Bernardino Mayor: *“Massive support; I mean a tremendous sense of pride.”*

Hon. Larry Allen, Court Facilities Committee Chair: *“And it will do a great deal to help the downtown area also. We’re going to be putting something in the middle of downtown San Bernardino that will be part of a campus that we’re hoping will also help revitalize the area in conjunction with the county and the city.”*

Studies and planning meetings have been going on for years now, with careful attention to detail.

Hon. James McGuire, Presiding Judge: *“If you’re going to create it you want it to be something that will last for many many years. The court house we’re in we’ve been in for decades. So we want something that will continue and be useful.”*

There’ll be 35 courtrooms and 2 hearing rooms – about 362 thousand square feet of space on 11 floors – replacing 7 facilities and efficiently consolidating court operations.

Hon. Larry Allen, Court Facilities Committee Chair: *“We are really going to have user friendly court facilities.”*

Security will be top notch including a digital camera system. Plus separate circulation for the public, judges and staff, and folks in custody.

Malcolm Franklin, Administrative Office of the Courts Security Manager.: *“It will be good solid state of the art when this facility is built.”*

The \$338-million project will also be a shot in the arm for the local and statewide economy.

S. Pearl Freeman, Administrative Office of the Courts Senior Project Manager: *“We’re very excited at the AOC because it’s bringing new courthouses to the state, it’s also bringing employment to the state at many different levels.”*

Hon. Douglas Elwell, Presiding Judge-Elect: *“We anticipate using it for decades to come. So the public’s commitment and investment in this project is going to be a century long project; a century long commitment to the community, money well spent.”*

Construction should take about 2 years; completion scheduled for early 2013.
I’m Leanne Kozak reporting in San Bernardino for California Courts News.