

Public Meetings Held to Discuss County Courthouse

The Monroe County Commissioners, in conjunction with the Judiciary, are working on plans to renovate, modernize and build an addition to the County Courthouse. These improvements are a high priority for the County and the Courts and are the result of many years of careful study that consistently demonstrated a need for both Courthouse expansion and modernization.

Given the importance of this project to the residents of Monroe County, the Commissioners and Court officials held public meetings on January 29, 2020 at Northampton Community College's Monroe County Campus in Tannersville and February 1, 2020 at East Stroudsburg University's Innovation Center in East Stroudsburg. The meetings were held to provide the public with information about the need to improve and expand the Monroe County Courthouse located in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. Led by the Monroe County Commissioners and President Judge Margherita Patti-Worthington of the 43rd Judicial District, the public meetings also provided a forum for discussions about the project from among the 50 plus people who attended from communities located throughout Monroe County.

Monroe County Chairman of the Commissioners - Sharon S. Laverdure welcomed the meeting attendees and moderated each meeting. As Moderator, Chairman Laverdure introduced each speaker, fielded questions from the public, and ensured that all persons who had questions or wished to offer comments and input were provided the opportunity to do so. The meetings are an example of the County's commitment to inform and engage elected officials, stakeholders, and the public about this important undertaking.

In addition to Chairman of the Commissioners - Sharon S. Laverdure, other project team members in attendance included:

- John R. Moyer, Vice Chairman, Monroe County Commissioner
- John D. Christy, Monroe County Commissioner
- Margherita Patti-Worthington, President Judge, Court of Common Pleas of the 43rd Judicial District
- Enrique Maciá, Project Manager, CGL Companies
- Robert Fisch, Senior Vice President, CGL Companies



Chairman Sharon S. Laverdure welcoming attendees.



Commissioner John R. Moyer addressing the audience.

Need for Courthouse Expansion Discussed

Located at Seventh and Monroe Streets in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, the historic Monroe County Courthouse was built in 1890 and is a three-story, ashlar sandstone and limestone building. An identically-sized addition was built in 1934, as a Public Works Administration project. The 1890 and 1934 portions of the Monroe County Courthouse were added to the National Register of Historic Places on April 18, 1979. In 1979, an addition immediately adjacent to the historic Courthouse was built at a time when there were two judges and the population of the county was 69,400. For the past 40 years, the Courthouse has served the community well. However, with the county's population now totaling over 169,500 residents, the volume of cases coming before the Court has also grown significantly with seven judges now assigned to the Courthouse to handle the caseload. As a result, the Courts, and the agencies and departments that support it, have been forced to use areas not designed for work spaces.

According to Commissioner Moyer, among the features being planned are improved interior directional signage, increased security measures, new electrical and mechanical systems, a single secure, ADA-accessible entrance to simplify ingress and egress, and a dedicated self-help area along with additional courtrooms, office space and other essential elements.

Commissioner Moyer spoke first, informing the audience about the three studies conducted over the past 12 years that consistently reached the same conclusions and recommendation - the Courthouse needs to be modernized and expanded and delaying the improvements and expansion further will worsen an already urgent situation. With that, the Monroe County Commissioners and the Courts have joined together to plan and design renovations to the historic Courthouse and the 1979 addition and to construct a new addition. Assisting with the planning and design of the improvements is a team of specialized consultants led by CGL Companies.

President Judge Margherita Patti-Worthington, representing the Judiciary, followed next, describing how the volume of civil, family and criminal cases in Monroe County has grown since the last Courthouse expansion in 1979, requiring additional judges, courtrooms, support staff, and offices. Equally important is the need to ensure safe and secure court facilities. The current Courthouse and the 1979 addition, do not allow for the necessary separation between the public, jurors, defendants, family members, judges, and other court personnel which pose a substantial safety and security risk, making the proposed improvements and expansion a high priority.

Robert Fisch and Enrique Maciá, both with CGL, are leading the team of consultants who are working with the County and Courts Officials to develop plans for the Courthouse improvements and expansion. The consultant team's responsibilities include space programming; architectural design; site, civil, structural, and mechanical engineering; historic preservation planning; fire protection and security systems; cost estimating; and public information among others. According to Robert Fisch, CGL has brought together the best firms representing all the key disciplines and a depth of knowledge about Courthouse design to ensure a successful outcome.

"Things have changed since 1979, certainly the operations of the courts have changed," said Margherita Patti-Worthington, President Judge of Monroe County. "The current Courthouse is no longer meeting the needs of the residents of Monroe County and an updated and expanded Courthouse will address those needs while enhancing the safety and security of the public, staff and judges, and improving services."



Commissioner Moyer discussed the studies that led to the decision to renovate the Courthouse.

Public Input Welcomed

With the conclusion of the presentations, the meetings were opened to questions and comments from the audience in attendance. It was also an opportunity to hear ideas and suggestions concerning the planned project and to ensure that topics of local importance are not overlooked during the planning, design, and construction phases.

Among the concerns voiced by community members was the limited capacity of 6th Street and its use as the primary access route to and from the new Courthouse addition. This is a concern during the construction phase when underground installations will disrupt normal street operation and parking spaces are lost to construction equipment and material staging. Another concern expressed was the need to acquire private property for the project, thereby removing land from Stroudsburg Borough's tax rolls and reducing property tax payments to the city. These and other questions were addressed during the meetings and are included under "More Frequently Asked Questions" on the following pages.

Speaking for the project team, Chairman Laverdure expressed appreciation for those who took time from their schedules to attend and participate at the public meetings. *"The constructive comments and questions we received will help as we move forward with planning and design of an improved and expanded Courthouse. While there were many comments expressed on a range of topics, this is not something we can put off any longer"* she said. Plans are to continue with public outreach activities during 2020.



Monroe County Chairman of Commissioners Sharon S. Laverdure



President Judge Margherita Patti-Worthington discussing the Courthouse project following the public meeting.



Audience members attend public meeting at East Stroudsburg University's Innovation Center (February 1, 2020).

More Frequently Asked Questions

Newsletters about the Courthouse project anticipate questions from groups and individuals in the form of “Frequently Asked Questions” and offers answers that represent currently available project information.

Q 1 What properties will be acquired to accommodate the Courthouse expansion?

Among the criteria for developing and evaluating alternative expansion plans is minimizing private property acquisition. The emerging expansion plan does that by limiting acquisition to only the PNC bank property which adjoins the 1979 addition. While any private property removed from the tax rolls for the project will result in a loss of local and county property tax revenues, it is expected that the reduction will be slight and not affect government operations and services.

Q 2 How will traffic flow and parking be affected during construction and what steps will be taken to minimize impacts to residents and businesses?

The impacts and inconveniences that may result to nearby residents and businesses during construction is of paramount importance to the project team. Attention is being given to ways to minimize impacts resulting from any temporary closures and parking restrictions affecting the street network surrounding the Courthouse. Information will be shared as plans for managing the construction are developed.

Q 3 What steps will be taken to enhance sustainability and reduce the building’s carbon footprint?

The Courthouse expansion will maximize sustainability and significantly reduce the building’s carbon footprint. Among the sustainable features is the continued use of the historic Courthouse and the Annex buildings. In addition to installing modern, more efficient engineering systems, the structural components, all exterior components, and most interior elements of the historic Courthouse will be preserved, greatly reducing the need for new carbon intensive materials. Other sustainable features will include enhancing the exterior envelope of the new addition with high insulation values; installing new energy efficient mechanical systems that exceed minimum building code requirements; use of energy efficient LED light fixtures and materials with high recycled content throughout; and low flow plumbing fixtures for all staff and public areas among other features.

Q 4 Describe the safety and security features of the Courthouse expansion.

The Courthouse expansion is being designed to provide the highest levels of security for the public, staff and in-custody defendants. All visitors will be screened through airport-style security screening equipment at a consolidated public entrance. Most staff will also use the single secure public entrance with a limited number accessing the building through the secure staff parking area. In-custody defendants and Sheriff vehicles will access the building through an enclosed entrance out of sight of the public. The building will also include dedicated fire stairs and secure egress points to allow controlled evacuation during emergencies.



Location of the existing Courthouse and planned addition.



President Judge Margherita Patti-Worthington (February 1, 2020).

Q5 How many new courtrooms are being planned?

Plans are to build eight new courtrooms, three new hearing rooms, while maintaining one existing hearing room in the historic Courthouse for a total of 12 litigation spaces with the large historic courtroom preserved to function primarily as a jury assembly space. Courtrooms are being planned to meet projected needs through 2040 and beyond while allowing judges and staff to access both standard trial courtrooms and specialty courtrooms, permitting greater operational flexibility and facilitating efficient management of the courts caseload.

Q6 Will expanding the Courthouse increase its operating and maintenance costs?

With an improved Courthouse design, use of modern and highly efficient mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems, and a better work environment, improved productivity will be achieved while keeping operating and maintenance costs as low as possible.

Q7 How much will the Courthouse improvements and addition cost?

Cost estimates are being refined as the plans for the Courthouse become more detailed. However, preliminary cost estimates for the work ranges from \$70 to \$80 million with a precise estimate to be produced during later stages of planning and design.

Q8 How will the Courthouse construction be financed?

The least costly source of financing is to use General Obligation (GO) bonds which, at this time, is the likely method of financing the construction.

Q9 What will the Courthouse expansion look like?

No exterior alterations are planned for the historic Courthouse and the 1979 addition. The appearance of the new Courthouse addition will be an important factor in the planning and design process which is still months away from completion. Efforts will be made to ensuring the expansion will conform to the surrounding community as well as providing the level of protection and security required of modern courts design.



President Judge Margherita Patti Worthington addressing public meeting attendees (January 29, 2020).



Robert Fisch (CGL) discussing the planning and design process for the Courthouse addition.



Monroe County Courthouse, Stroudsburg, PA.

Upcoming Activities

The Monroe County Courthouse planning and development process is moving forward with these activities expected in the months ahead:

March 2020	Complete schematic design of Courthouse expansion. Continue engaging stakeholders and public in the Courthouse planning process. Look to the Monroe County Courthouse website for information, announcements, and upcoming activities. Publish Newsletter Vol. 2.
Future	Look to the Monroe County Courthouse website for information, announcements, and upcoming activities. Publish Newsletter Vol. 3.

Interested in Learning More?

For additional information visit www.monroecountypa.gov/Dept/CourthouseProject or contact:

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