



Board of Commissioners
Benton County, Oregon
205 NW 5th Street, Corvallis, OR 97330

Phone 541-766-6800 Fax 541-766-6893
Email xanthippe.augerot@co.benton.or.us
Web www.co.benton.or.us

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Ways & Means Subcommittee on Public Safety

Co-Chair Senator Winters, Co-Chair Representative Piluso and members of the committee,

Our Benton County Courthouse is 131 years old. It is Oregon's oldest active courthouse, and now serves 3 times the population it was intended to serve. Over the past 131 years, the Courthouse has been renovated and adapted many times, but we are running out of ways to mesh 21st century technology with a 19th century building. At present, the building needs a new boiler – and a replacement for the original, steel-tiled roof. Lighting, heating, security, and maintenance are all an ongoing challenge.

Our courthouse is an unreinforced masonry structure, which would likely fail in a moderate to severe earthquake. A 2016 structural evaluation demonstrated that a seismic retrofit would require an investment of more than \$12 million dollars, and a significant loss of usable floor space.

Operationally, the building is minimally ADA accessible and does not provide adequate security separation for the public and offenders. The floor plan currently does not provide for ease of access by judges and staff to courtrooms, adequate jury rooms, private consultation rooms for the defense bar, and secure parking for judges and staff.

Based on the AOC-OJD Courthouse Task Force rankings, Benton County is first in line for improvement funds to address our roof and boiler, and is next in line for Courthouse planning and design support to prepare for Courthouse replacement.

Over the past year, we engaged both internal stakeholders and the broader community in a Benton County Criminal Justice Systems Assessment. Two of our Circuit Court judges participated in our Criminal Justice Steering Committee, and our trial courts administrator has been very supportive. The process resulted in a vision for an effective, efficient and equitable system, which will require strategic investments in both new programs and new facilities. To meet modern practices and standards, the Assessment concluded that we should have a Courthouse that almost doubles usable area, or at least 37,000 sf.

Based on our Criminal Justice Assessment and review of the construction market, we recognize that our previous cost estimate for a fully-loaded courthouse replacement was significantly low. Our best estimate at present is that the total project cost will be in the range of \$27 to 32 million.

We are ready to begin a more in-depth planning process. Our objective this biennium, with your support, is to do the planning, design and due diligence with community partners to be able to present an accurate cost when we come back to you in 2021/23 for request for bonding support. Our current request is for \$2 million in state assistance for planning and design. We have set aside matching funds in our proposed county budget, from our general revenues.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



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Commissioner