

Planning for Courthouse Improvements and Expansion

The Monroe County Commissioners together with the Judiciary are proceeding with plans to renovate, modernize and build an addition to the County Courthouse. These improvements are a priority for the County and the Court, and the result of over a decade of careful study that consistently demonstrated a need for both expansion and modernization. All of our studies have reached the same conclusion: the existing buildings are outdated, undersized, inefficient, and cannot adequately ensure the safety and security of their occupants.

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.

The courthouse was last expanded in 1979 when there were only two judges and the population of the county was 69,400. Since then, the courthouse has served our community well. However, the Court now has seven judges and the population has more than doubled to 169,500.

Meeting current needs has forced the use of spaces not designed as work areas. With space limitations and an increasingly aged facility, Monroe County Officials have embarked on a project to upgrade the existing courthouse and construct an addition. The officials are committed to informing and engaging elected officials, stakeholders, and the public-at-large about the progress in planning and developing new and improved courthouse facilities.

All plans and designs for the courthouse will utilize current state and national courtroom standards in determining facility programming. Monroe County is being assisted by consultants who are responsible for conducting various tasks including:

- Data Collection
- Visioning
- Concept Drawings
- Historic Preservation
- Parking Study
- Community Outreach
- Needs Assessment
- Cost/Budget Estimates
- Structural/Facade Survey
- Pre-Design Report

Determining current and future courthouse needs are the focus of the Project Team's initial efforts and it is through these tasks that team members will begin interacting with various stakeholders and the public.



Historic Monroe County Courthouse

Community Outreach

Modernizing the courthouse to meet current and future needs will greatly enhance the safety and security of the public, visitors, jurors, court employees, and judges.

Plans for courthouse improvements and expansion will spark interest among a diverse group of stakeholders including elected officials, historic preservation groups, nearby property and business owners, and the public. Therefore, a successful outcome requires a process that informs and educates all interested parties about the need for the planned improvements and works together to develop the eventual result.

With this Newsletter, Monroe County officials, in collaboration with the Courts, are initiating outreach activities to introduce the courthouse project, provide the rationale for undertaking these much-needed improvements, and share information as the planning and design process unfolds. The newsletter will continue throughout the process and will include periodic updates.

Officials will hold public meetings with dates and times to be announced in the newsletter, on the website and through various media. Updated information will be available on www.monroecountypa.gov/Dept/CourthouseProject.



View of rear entrance to Historic Courthouse.

About Monroe County Courts

The Court of Common Pleas of the 43rd Judicial District is the state trial court of general jurisdiction located in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania and comprises the geographical boundaries of Monroe County. The county was founded in 1836 and was formed from sections of Northampton and Pike counties. Named in honor of James Monroe, the fifth president of the United States, the county is located in northeastern Pennsylvania, along its border with New Jersey.

The Courts are an independent branch of government and are dedicated to the administration of justice in a fair, impartial and timely manner in accordance with the rule of law and the constitutions of the United States of America and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. In fulfilling this role, the Court strives to provide the communities it serves with an environment that is safe, accessible and respectful to all. The Court conducts its business with integrity, competence and a commitment to excellence in order to promote public trust and confidence in the judicial system.

The Court has original jurisdiction over all cases not exclusively assigned to another court and appellate jurisdiction over judgments from the minor courts. The Court also hears appeals from certain state and most local government agencies. The courts are established by Article V, Section 5 of the Pennsylvania Constitution: "There shall be one court of common pleas for each judicial district (a) having such divisions and consisting of such number of judges as shall be provided by law, one of whom shall be the president judge; and (b) having unlimited original jurisdiction in all cases except as may otherwise be provided by law."

The Court of Common Pleas consists of seven judges, who serve ten-year terms and are state officials. The judges preside over cases involving criminal, civil, family, juvenile and orphans' court matters. The Court's offices include Court Administration, Adult and Juvenile Probation, Domestic Relations, Child Custody, Jury Management and Pre-Trial Services. The Court also provides administrative services to and oversight of the nine Magisterial District Courts that serve Monroe County.

The Office of Court Administration manages day to day court operations such as: scheduling (Arbitrations, Divorce Master hearings, Custody Conciliation conferences, Mortgage Foreclosure); issuing jury summons; jury selection, judicial assignments, courtroom and equipment management, ADA accommodation; interpreters for limited English proficiency case participants; and general public information. All duties are performed subject to the direction of the President Judge.

Frequently Asked Questions

This Newsletter anticipates questions from groups and individuals in the form of “Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)” and offers answers that accurately represent Monroe County’s rationale for the project and currently available information. Other newsletters will be prepared as the project proceeds and additional information about courthouse plans becomes available.

Q1

Why is Monroe County investing to improve and expand the courthouse?

The volume of civil, family and criminal cases in the Court of Common Pleas in Monroe County has grown considerably since the last courthouse expansion in 1979, requiring additional judges, courtrooms, support staff, and offices. The current courthouse is no longer meeting the needs of the Courts or the residents of Monroe County and an updated and expanded courthouse will address those needs, ensure the safety and security of the public, staff and judges, and improve services.

Q2

How will public safety be improved?

By its historic design, the current courthouse does not allow for the necessary separation between the public, juries, offenders, parties, and judges which poses a substantial safety and security risk. The planned upgrades and new addition will employ state-of-the-art design features and security technology to improve public safety over the current condition.

Q3

What security features will be incorporated into the new courthouse?

Among the design features under consideration are a single entrance to be used by staff and the public, greater use of electronic surveillance systems, metal detectors and similar security equipment and internal circulation systems that limit interactions between the public, offenders, jurors, and staff.

Q4

How will the historic courthouse features and character be affected by the new addition?

The consultant team includes historic preservation specialists who are contributing their expertise to the planning and design process to ensure the protection and preservation of the historic courthouse’s character and appearance.

Q5

What is the timeline for constructing the improvements and expansion?

Construction could begin in 2021 and with phasing, take approximately three years to complete. Further updates to the design and construction schedule will be included in future newsletters as information becomes available.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q6

What benefits are there from improving and expanding the courthouse?

Improving and expanding the courthouse will improve public access via improved layout, circulation, and directional signage; provide safer, more secure and functional courtrooms and waiting areas; improve jury facilities, self-help and victim services; and enhanced technology for accessing court records, among many other benefits.

Q7

Can Monroe County afford to improve and expand its courthouse when there are other pressing needs?

Monroe County can't afford not to make this investment. There has been no substantial improvement or expansion to the County's court facilities in over 40 years while the volume of proceedings has grown substantially during that time along with the need to provide a safer and more secure courthouse environment.

Q8

What will the courthouse expansion look like?

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 ensure the expansion will respond to the surrounding context as well as provide the level of protection and security required of modern courts design.

Q9

Why invest in the courthouse?

The need for an updated and expanded courthouse has been well documented in studies conducted over the past 10 years. Investing in the court's infrastructure will improve access to the justice system which has experienced substantial growth since the last courthouse expansion in 1979. In addition, needed improvements to safety and security in addition to changes in court processes and the use of technology all point to the necessity to improve and expand the courthouse.



Aerial view of Monroe County Courthouse towards north

Q10

What property will be needed to develop the expanded courthouse?

Alternative concept plans are being developed that will determine the property needed to accommodate courthouse expansion. In evaluating alternative plans, minimizing the need to acquire privately owned land is an important consideration with efforts focused on placing the addition on county-owned land. However, the likelihood exists that one privately owned parcel will need to be acquired.

Q11

What are the likely impacts of an improved and expanded courthouse on the local economy?

During construction, a large portion of the overall budget will be devoted to the manpower needed to build the courthouse along with the purchase of building materials. Various construction contractors, building suppliers and trades will participate in the project which should have a positive effect on the county and regional economies.

Q12

How long will the proposed improvements and expansion serve the county's needs?

Current studies show the proposed expansion will meet the county's needs for approximately 20+ years.

Q13

What steps were taken to minimize the size and cost of courthouse expansion?

County officials will utilize all available space within county-owned buildings to meet current needs. The offices of the Monroe County Detectives, District Attorney and Public Defender were moved to 701 Main Street. Other offices will be moved from the Courthouse to the Administrative Center before construction begins.



View of rear entrance to Historic Courthouse and 1979 Addition



View of Monroe County Courthouse

Upcoming Activities

Officials of Monroe County and the Courts invite you to attend a meeting with representatives of the team leading this undertaking who will explain the nature of and necessity for the courthouse improvements. Meetings are scheduled for:

- 7:00 PM, Wednesday, January 29, 2020 in Pocono Hall (Room 108) at Northampton Community College's Monroe County Campus, 2411 Route 715, Tannersville, PA. 18372

and

- 10:00 AM, Saturday, February 1, 2020 at East Stroudsburg University's Innovation Center (ESU Innovation Center), 562 Independence Road, East Stroudsburg, PA. 18301



Interested in Learning More?

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

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