

Frequently Asked Questions

FAQs about the Courthouse and Regional Administrative Building Project

How would we pay for the new Courthouse?

The new Courthouse would be funded by a property tax increase collected over 25 years. The Washington State Legislature has allowed Thurston County to pay for the new courthouse through a levy-lift to pay back bonds of up to 25 years. All other counties are only allowed nine years to pay back bonds.

Thurston County Citizens will decide whether to approve the property tax increase in an upcoming election, requiring a simple majority for passage. If approved, the property tax increase on a \$300,000 house would be approximately \$12 per month.

Use the calculator to the right to estimate the annual property tax you may pay for the courthouse, if passed. Type your property value under the 'property value' input.

NOTE: The calculator is currently not working correctly in the Internet Explorer web browser. If you cannot see the calculator to the right, go [here](#) to view in a different web setting.

Inputs

Property Value:

Outputs

Property Tax:

\$0.00

Why consider a new Courthouse?

The Thurston County Board of Commissioners has an obligation to provide adequate facilities for all elected officials, departments, and staff. The current facilities, commonly called the Courthouse or Courthouse Complex, are inadequate.

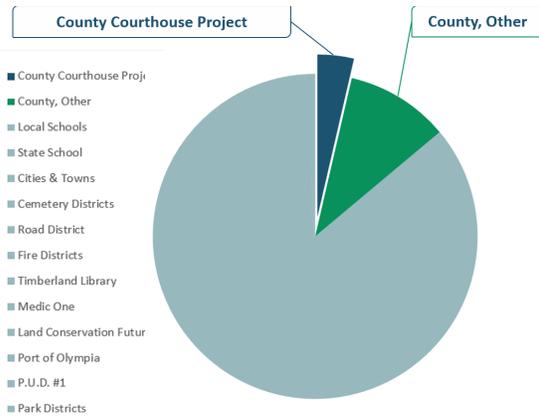
The existing Courthouse Complex, consisting of buildings 1, 2, and 3, was constructed in 1978. Over time, the county purchased buildings 4, 5, and 6 to expand capacity.

Since 1980, Thurston County's population has increased by more than 100,000 people. As a result, county services have outgrown the current Courthouse buildings. There is not enough space for the courts and county services. Space limitations cause inefficiencies that lead to late start times, delays in the courtroom, and juggling of locations.

In addition, existing heating and cooling systems are inefficient and cannot be repaired cost effectively. The roof leaks. The current courthouse buildings do not meet current earthquake safety codes. And, cabling in the buildings does not meet today's technology needs.

The current design poses potential security risks because people accused of crimes are escorted to court along public hallways shared with jurors, judges, staff, and visitors. The campus also consists of six buildings with only two separate security checkpoints.

Parking is limited, and parking spaces are often full during the day. According to www.walkscore.com, the transit service is rated 40 on a 100-point scale and jurors and citizens have limited amenities within walking distance.



Will this project increase my property taxes by 43%?

No. Should this ballot measure pass, it will not increase your **overall** property taxes by 43%.

Many different entities receive funding from the property taxes paid by citizens of Thurston County, including, but not limited to, the state, county, schools, fire districts, cities, etc. The county receives a little less than 10% of property taxes. Of that 10%, this project would increase the amount the county receives by a little more than 43%.

The increase in property taxes collected by the county would be an increase of \$.47, at most, per \$1,000 assessed value of the property. The county currently collects \$1.09 in property tax per \$1,000 assessed value. The passage of this ballot would increase the property tax collected by the county to, at most, \$1.56 per \$1,000 assessed value.

How was the cost of a new Courthouse determined?

To determine the \$250,000,000 cost of the new Courthouse and Regional Administrative Buildings, the county hired an expert team to determine the cost to build equivalent structures and parking on each of three alternative sites. Architect, engineering, construction, and real estate experts helped develop the cost estimates.

The team calculated the space needs of the courts and county offices and departments and cost to address security needs, energy efficiency, and seismic safety standards. Allowances for taxes, permits, inflation, and contingencies were also considered.

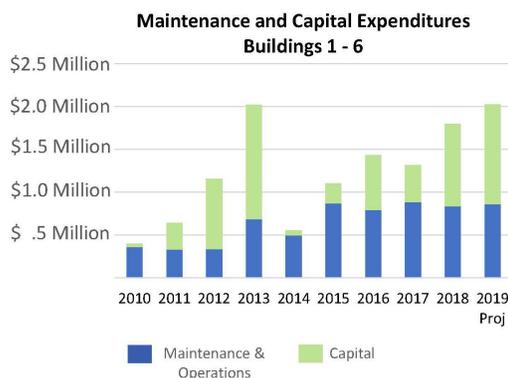
The cost to build on each site varied depending on whether it would be necessary to demolish existing structures, build in phases, or temporarily relocate county services during the building phase on specific sites. The estimate of the cost to build on sites, other than the current Hilltop site, took into account the potential revenue gained by selling the Hilltop property.

Is the county required to use the funds to build a new Courthouse?

Ordinance no. 15757 adopted by the Board of County Commissioners on April 30, 2019 states: "Section 2. (a) Purpose: The amounts collected pursuant to the increase authorized by the Proposition shall be used to make the following improvements, including payments on bonds, which are included in part in the final 2018 Thurston County Courthouse & Regional Buildings Report:

- Construct a new courthouse;
- Construct new administrative buildings for general government purposes;
- Construct a new parking structure; and
- Construct improvements for the consolidation of County offices that will not be located at the news courthouse or new administrative buildings."

The ordinance goes on to clarify that if the county determines that the new courthouse can't be built because conditions change or costs are substantially more than the estimated amount, the Board of County Commissioner may apply the proceeds of the levy increase to other purposes.



Was renovating the existing Courthouse considered?

Yes. The existing Courthouse would need about \$50 million to repair and maintain it for the next 10 years, according to a study by an independent consultant completed in 2016. This does not include adding the space needed for county services today or allowing for the county's growing needs in the coming years. It also does not address parking or current access issues.

The same study notes: "The surveyed sites and buildings are well maintained by knowledgeable, dedicated maintenance staff given limited resources available." (Section 1.2)

As buildings age, the cost to maintain the building grows. This is especially true for 40-year old buildings designed to last only 25-30 years.

How were the three potential sites selected?

Over the past two years, the Board of County Commissioners have been working with county elected officials and staff, and the City of Olympia, to evaluate the need, space considerations, funding, service needs, and accessibility of the current courthouse and considering potential new sites within the City of Olympia, as required by state law. Activities included:

- Holding monthly meetings with county elected officials and the City of Olympia to discuss all aspects of the project.
- Developing evaluation criteria for the sites including size of acreage available, road and transit access, utility service, space for on-site parking, and risk from an earthquake and sea-level rise.
- Contracting with a consulting firm to perform feasibility studies on and provide site options for three sites.
- Gathering public input and feedback at more than 15 open houses in the fall of 2018 and through an online survey about alternative sites, accessibility, and compatibility with surrounding neighborhoods.
- Conducting a statistically valid survey in the spring of 2019, via telephone and online, to gather information about citizens understanding of the project and need for a new courthouse.
- Holding a public hearing on the proposed resolution.
- Gathering input from the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) comprised of interested private citizens from all parts of Thurston County.

How would a new Courthouse be different than what we have now?

The new Courthouse would combine 16 County offices and departments, that are now in seven buildings, into one single or two adjacent buildings. A central one-stop customer service desk would help people find the services, offices, and departments they are looking for.

A new location would be accessible by foot, bike, car, or bus, with more parking and more frequent bus service. The new Courthouse would also provide new meeting and public areas.

The new Courthouse would have 50 percent more space. It would be built to high efficiency standards resulting in long-term cost savings in heating, cooling, lighting, maintenance, and information technology infrastructure.

Who would use the new Courthouse?

Citizens would visit the Courthouse for county services, as they do today, to:

- Serve on a jury
- Make a payment
- Apply for a permit
- Apply for a passport
- Register to vote
- Visit a County official
- Conduct court-related business
- Attend a meeting or hearing
- Obtain a marriage license
- Obtain motor vehicle registrations or renew tabs

The new Courthouse would be home to District Court, Superior Court, Olympia Municipal Court (if the Plum St site is selected), the County Clerk's Office, Prosecuting Attorney's Office, Pretrial Services, and Public Defense, as well as the County Assessor, Auditor, Treasurer and Board of County Commissioners, Community Planning and Economic Development, Human Resources, and Public Health and Social Services.

Why is this being put on the April 2020 ballot?

In spring of 2019, the county conducted a statistically valid citizen survey. The [survey results](#) showed that 63% of the respondents didn't know this project was happening. The county saw the need for additional time to provide information about this project to the citizens. Selecting the April 2020 date allowed for a full year for the county to make information and facts available for the citizens to make an informed decision.

What are the next steps if the ballot measure passes?

If the voters choose to pass the ballot in April, 2020, the county will:

- Release a request for proposals to obtain a contract for the design and construction of the buildings.
- Finalize agreements with the City of Olympia for land purchase and long-term lease.
- Secure and issue municipal bonds to fund construction of new facilities.