



Proposed courthouse plans unveiled

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— Plans for a proposed four-story county courthouse and a county 911 center were unveiled to the Rogers County Commission Monday morning. The fate of the \$23 million facilities will fall before voters on Dec. 8 when the issue of extending the 1/6-cent sales tax will be up for renewal. That sales tax currently pays for the building bond that was used to build the Rogers County Jail in 2001. It will be paid for in January 2010.

Overcrowding and public safety concerns have been at issue with the existing courthouse. One judge does not have a courtroom and because of flooding, there is a mold concern throughout the building.

The plans call for the proposed courthouse to be constructed adjacent to the existing Rogers County Sheriff's Office and jail. In addition, BKL, Inc., the architects hired to draw up plans and conduct a feasibility study, propose to permanently close off Missouri Street which will allow for approximately 212 parking spaces and a "formal atmosphere a courthouse should have out front," Kim Reeve with BKL, Inc., told the commission. Building the proposed courthouse adjacent to the sheriff's office will allow for inmates to be transported to and from court hearings securely and away from the public. Ultimately, if the issue passes, the current sheriff's office/jail would be used solely as a jail and all sheriff's office personnel except jail administration would be housed in the new courthouse.

There will be approximately 100,000 square feet of building space inside the proposed facility with an open staircase that will allow lighting to come in from above. A grassy "memorial mall" will be placed out front for memorials.

Housed on the first floor will be the county sheriff, clerk, assessor, treasurer, OSU extension and emergency operations offices. The county commission, court clerk and district attorney offices will be located on the second floor along with a multi-purpose room that can be used by any county office. The county commission meeting room will be twice the size of the current meeting quarters, according to Reeve.

Sheriff Scott Walton said having his administration housed in the courthouse will give more space to the jail.

"That would give us quite a few more beds needed in the jail," Walton said.

Four courtrooms will be located on the second floor and two large district courtrooms are planned for the fourth floor. There will be room to add two additional courtrooms on the fourth floor, but those rooms will be used for storage once the proposed facility is constructed.

Judicial staff, including staff from the district attorney's office, will have a separate stairwell and hallway to access courtrooms away from the public access.

The feasibility study was also presented to the commission which listed different ideas presented by the 11-member advisory committee appointed as a recommending body to work on the courthouse project.

The study indicated there were four options presented concerning the courthouse issue:

The first idea was to remodel and add on to the current courthouse.

"This idea was good and bad," Billy Knowles, BKL, Inc., said. "The money it would take to renovate the building would cost as much as it would to build a new one."

Idea No. 2 was to remodel the existing building for the judicial system and build a new administration building. Then there was an idea to remodel the existing courthouse for county office use and build a new court building.

The final idea was the most feasible: build a new county courthouse and demolish the existing facility.

According to Reeve and Knowles, the proposed facility can be constructed while the existing courthouse is still open for business.

The proposed Rogers County 911 Center will house a countywide dispatching system meaning dispatching for all emergency services will be at a central location.

"This will be a very secure facility with no windows and one entrance," Reeve said. "The idea was to create a facility that would protect from all forms of threat, man made and natural. It's essentially a bunker that we dressed up."

A location for the 911 center has yet to be acquired.

On Nov. 10, an open house will be held at the Rogers County Courthouse to give elected officials, law enforcement and fire officials from all over the county a chance to hear a presentation from BKL, Inc., on the proposed facilities and to ask questions and view the plans. A tour of the courthouse is planned as well and a tour of the sheriff's office and jail will take place at the conclusion of the open house. The open house will begin at 5:30 p.m. All county officials will be on hand for the open house.

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Photos



Rogers County Commissioners Kirt Thacker listen as Kim Reeve with BKL, Inc., discusses plans for the proposed new courthouse voters will have before them on the December ballot.



The front view of what the proposed county courthouse will look like.



This aerial drawing on the proposed courthouse shows the building will connect to the existing Rogers County Sheriff's Office/Jail. If voters pass the measure, the sheriff's office/jail will house only jail personnel and inmates and all other positions in the sheriff's office will be housed at the new courthouse.