

Washington County

On Monday, April 28, 2014 the Washington County Commissioners formally voted to proceed with the expansion of the Courthouse. This project has been in the talking stages for twenty years or more, now it will become a reality. The expansion had been postponed several times as other court facilities developed structural problems needing more immediate attention. The Commissioners opted for an arrangement where the State of Maine will build and own the new addition to be conveniently attached to the rear of the current structure.



Construction begins this summer with an ambitious completion date of December 2015.

From the 1998 publication, *The Courthouses of Maine* by Robert K. Sloane, comes the following description: “The 1855 courthouse was built in the Italianate style, entirely of brick with heavy wooden dentils on the cornice and gable ends. It was the first brick structure in Machias. Horizontal granite string courses marked the levels of the ground and second floors. Brick pilasters flanked the arched windows set into arched recesses on the second floor. A square wooden cupola topped the gable end facing Court Street with its arched window. A pair of brass scales of justice crowned the top of the cupola. A bell was added in 1868, perhaps to notify the town of terms of court or to call jurors to duty.

In the interior of the new building a lobby or hall extended the length of the main floor. Off each side of the hall were county offices, protected by cast iron fire doors. Fireproof shutters were stationed on the inside of the windows. Four fireplaces of oversized reddish-brown brick were provided to warm the offices. The fireplace bricks were carved with a flower design.

Access to the second floor was by way of two sets of metal stairs on either side of the main entrance. Curving up to the second floor landing, the stairs led directly to the courtroom. Taking up most of the second floor, the courtroom had seating on three sides with the judge’s bench at the end opposite the main door. The courtroom was rebuilt after the building was damaged by a storm in 1869. Outside the courtroom, the only other rooms on the second floor were two small rooms on either side of the landing.”

The State of Maine conceived a long-term facilities plan some years ago when they recognized the need to update a number of court houses around the state built in the last century and lacking modern facilities. The addition will house screening facilities, including an x-ray machine at the new public entrance, on Cooper Street. Diagonally across from the entrance is a new public parking lot of more than fifty spaces; sure to be a bonus for those who search for a parking place on busy days.

Incorporated into the new design are dedicated areas for the public, court personnel, and inmates. This separation of populations has governed much of the new design and the renovations to come. The project is to be built in phases. The first phase will consist of creating new parking areas for the public and employees. Then the underground fuel tank will be removed and the new building erected. This work is slated to take about a year. Once the new space is ready, the second phase will begin. That will

consist of connecting the two buildings through renovation and reconstruction particularly to the second floor. Phase three will see the renovations to the Superior Court room, which will be extensive and retain the historic characteristics, right down to re-using the original furniture.

While the majority of the construction is going on, the Registry of Deeds will be re-located to the first floor of the Post Office Building, across Cooper St.; it was most fortunate that the space was available. Their office hours will remain the same once the few days of moving are completed.

The State of Maine's Bureau of General Services has opened the bids for a general contractor for the project. The parking lots are first on the list. The Registry of Deeds is moving across the street next week. Exciting times in Washington County.