



# Washington County Courthouse project adding comfort, security

Posted By Johanna S. Billings On March 22, 2015 (9:35 am) In [Down East](#), [News](#)

MACHIAS, Maine — The Washington County Courthouse is getting a makeover.

An \$8.3 million project now under way and funded wholly by the state of Maine involves a 94-foot addition, refurbishing of the interior of the existing building and more parking.

It also means more restrooms.

“We are very low on public restrooms. We basically have one down here [on the first floor] and one on the second floor,” County Manager Betsy Fitzgerald said March 19. “That isn’t a good situation.”

Perhaps even more important than additional restrooms is the fact that renovations will eliminate what Fitzgerald terms a “mixing of populations.”

Currently, the public, staff, prisoners and participants in civil court cases are forced to share the same space in order to get around inside the courthouse.

“Opposing parties could sit and look at each other in the hallway,” she said.

So far, she said, no problems have arisen but the potential exists.

The courthouse's only elevator is used by prisoners from the adjacent jail who are going to or from hearings and trials.

Once the project is completed, the public will not have access to the same routes as prisoners.

"This route will remain but we are building walls," Fitzgerald said, pointing to a site plan that shows which hallways and corridors are used by prisoners coming to the courthouse.

At one point, officials considered building an entirely new courthouse somewhere in Machias, Fitzgerald said.

"I think it was pretty quickly established that if you build the building somewhere else in Machias, you would have to transport the prisoners," she said.

When the addition is completed, populations also will mix less when entering and leaving courtrooms. For example, the stairs inside the front of the building will no longer be used to access the superior courtroom upstairs. They will serve as an exit for the public. An elevator will be available for those who need one. Members of the jury, prisoners and court staff will all exit the courtroom via separate pathways.

Now everyone leaves through the same doors, Fitzgerald said.

"At the end of a trial, the jury leaves through the same doors as the public," she said, adding this could be problematic if someone doesn't like the jury's verdict and wants to make an issue of it.

Fitzgerald said she was happy about the addition of small conference rooms for attorneys to confer with clients — because they can close the door.

"So I don't hear it when they're in the stairwell," Fitzgerald said.

Likewise, the new entrance to the courtroom will be on Cooper Street.

"The front doors of the building, which people have used since 1855, will become an exit only," she said.

The new entrance and the courtrooms will be handicap accessible.

Other amenities include a Washington County Heritage Center to showcase historical artifacts related to the county.

"I know a lot of people are really excited about that," she said.

Fitzgerald's office will move across the hallway and her office will become a library with an extensive genealogical collection.

Washington County Archives Committee has the largest collection of newspapers in the state, with 600 volumes, and these also will be made available to the public.

Officials gave the go-ahead to the project in the fall of 2013 and work began in the fall of 2014. The addition is expected to be completed in December.

"The building has been wrapped in plastic so it looks like a giant marshmallow," Fitzgerald said. The plastic is used so that the areas can be heated, even outside, so that work can be completed despite the cold.





PRELIMINARY SITE LAYOUT

— 1/8" = 1' —

W. WILSON/STUDIO  
ARCHITECTS, INC.

Washington County Courthouse

Bedford, Mass.

100 HANCOCK ST.



Ground Floor Plan

Design Plan

Washington County Courthouse



First Floor Plan

Design Plan

Washington County Courthouse

R2



Second Floor Plan  
1/2" = 1'-0"