



SANTA BARBARA COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT

PRESS RELEASE

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Santa Barbara Superior Court Building Project Given “Green Light”

The Santa Barbara Superior Court won a key recommendation by the blue ribbon committee created by California’s Chief Justice and Chair of the Judicial Council and known as the Court Facilities Working Group (CFWG). Last Friday, after listening to high level presentations by 24 courts with 31 “immediate” or “critical” needs building projects, Santa Barbara received a green light to proceed with its project to construct a new criminal courts building complex at its Figueroa location across the street from the Historic Courthouse. This project is among 41 court projects statewide that received a high priority ranking a few years ago for special funding to correct severe deficiencies due to lack of security, overcrowding, and the poor physical condition of court facilities.

Presiding Judge Brian Hill and Court Executive Officer Gary Blair, made a presentation about Santa Barbara Superior Court’s project to the committee which will consolidate all eight (8) criminal courtrooms into one building complex by moving two (2) criminal courtrooms out of the Historic Courthouse and relocating them with six (6) criminal courtrooms operating in a new building behind the Figueroa Courthouse.

Last year, the state purchased the former “Hayward” property located on Santa Barbara Street which will become part of the footprint for the new building. The Figueroa Courthouse building will be re-modeled and reused primarily for court staff. This will eliminate the need to escort prisoners across the public crosswalk in the middle of Figueroa Street and through public hallways in the Historic Courthouse in order to attend their hearings and trials in Departments One and Two. It will also resolve the security risks associated with escorting prisoners through public elevators, stairwells, and hallways in the Figueroa Courthouse complex where only one of the existing six (6) courtrooms is accessible directly from the Sheriff’s overcrowded basement holding facility. Presiding Judge Brian Hill stated: *“Our Figueroa Court Building was constructed nearly 60 years ago at a time when the south coast was significantly less populated. Times have changed and the need for a more functional court and secure building is imperative.”*

Superior Court Executive Officer, Gary Blair, commented: *“Santa Barbara has a unique security situation which requires us to walk in-custody defendants across the street in front of international and domestic tourists who are daily debarking from numerous buses parked in front of the Historic Courthouse. It is a dysfunctional situation and a security tragedy waiting to happen.”*

First District Supervisor, Salud Carbajal added: *“This is a fantastic project for our Santa Barbara area as it will be an economic stimulus for the community while providing a safe and secure courthouse that functions more effectively. I am excited that we will also be able to keep our court functions in the downtown core of our community.”* Supervisor Carbajal has been the Board of Supervisor’s representative to the Project Advisory Group (PAG) which has provided important local oversight of this project since 2010.

Santa Barbara Mayor, Helene Schneider, was excited about the project going forward: *“The new criminal courts building ensure the safety and security for thousands of residents and tourists who visit Santa Barbara’s Historic Courthouse. They will no longer have to encounter the inmates who are routinely escorted across Figueroa Street. We are absolutely thrilled with the State’s decision to support our project.”*

Funding for this key project was originally approved by the State in 2010 with a estimated budget of \$152 million. Recent budget cuts have reduced the project budget, and the court has proposed ways for further cost-cutting measures to reduce it by another several million dollars. The funding comes from Senate Bill 1407 which imposed new fine and penalty assessments mainly in criminal cases. *“Blair added that it is appropriate the users of the court facilities will fund the cost of needed court buildings as opposed to the General Fund.”*

The CFWG's recommendations now go before the California Judicial Council for review and approval at its meeting on October 26th. The Judicial Council is chaired by California Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye and is the policy making body for the Judicial Branch of state government.

