

MILWAUKEE COUNTY
Inter-Office Communication

Date: November 11, 2025

To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: Aaron Hertzberg, Director, Department of Administrative Services
Ashley Adsit, Director of Project & Performance Management, Office of Strategy, Budget & Performance

Subject: A report from the Department of Administrative Services and Office of Strategy, Budget & Performance, providing an update on the Investing in Justice: Courthouse Complex project

File Type: Informational Report

REQUEST

This informational report from the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) and the Office of Strategy, Budget and Performance (SBP) provides an update on the Investing in Justice: Courthouse Complex project, which includes planning for the replacement of the Public Safety Building.

POLICY

This report follows information presented to the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors in prior years through files [17-592](#), [17-535](#), [16-673](#), [18-427](#), [18-430](#), [24-738](#), [24-44](#), [25-411](#), and [25-582](#).

BACKGROUND

The existing Courthouse Complex facilities are severely outdated and, in some cases, functionally obsolete, presenting significant public safety and security issues. In fact, the Public Safety Building was built nearly 100 years ago and does not meet modern needs for supporting the safety of the region, the health of the community, nor the rehabilitation of neighbors.

Due to the project's complexity, planning and construction was divided into five phases which vary in duration depending on the workload and funding levels available to support the effort. The mission of the five phases as originally defined:

- Phase I. (Previous Phase) Identify a consolidated, redesigned space for the people working in and served by the County Courts and identify the highest and best use of the County Courthouse.
- Phase II. (Previous Phase) Define a consolidated, redesigned space for the people working in the areas of non-court functions within the County Courthouse and

Public Safety Building and establish existing conditions and identify opportunities for increased efficiencies.

- Phase III. (Previous Phase) Determine ultimate space locations for all Departments associated with Phases I and II; complete space programming, designing, and build outs for swing space required for completion of Phases IV and V; determine preferred ownership, financing, and delivery methods for interim and ultimate solutions.
- Phase IV. (Current phase) Complete planning, programming, and design of a new Criminal Courthouse facility and other required facility improvements – including by incorporating community input. Complete master plans.
- Phase V. (Future phase) Construct new facilities, complete other required facility improvements, and relocate Departments to ultimate locations.

I. Project Progress

This report provides an update on Milwaukee County's Investing in Justice: Courthouse Complex (IJCC) project. The project seeks to modernize the County's core justice facilities by replacing the nearly 100-year-old Public Safety Building and enhancing operations in the Historic Courthouse and Criminal Justice Facility through facility design and process improvement.

Design & Construction Progress

Since the last report to the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors in September 2025, a major milestone has been achieved with finalization of a strategy for swing space. When implemented, the plan will move or "swing" Criminal Courts, the District Attorney's Office, Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office, and other court functions from the Public Safety Building into the Historic Courthouse. The following priorities guided development of the strategy:

- A. Safety and Security
- B. Avoidance of Unnecessary Moves
- C. Consideration of the Historic Courthouse Master Plan
- D. Public User Access
- E. Meet Court Function Needs

The swing space strategy prioritizes the use of the existing Historic Courthouse and maximizes the full potential of the square footage available. It also considers offices that provide frequent, direct services to the public to maintain accessibility and minimize public confusion. The plan matches department space needs to available swing space and ensures relocation supports operational efficiency, while keeping departments that require close coordination with other functions in proximity to one another. In order to move court functions, the District Attorney's Office, and much of the Sheriff's Office into the Historic Courthouse,

design consultants worked with internal-facing departments that have low public traffic and fewer operational dependencies to reassess programming space needs and opportunities to move units off-site.

Court functions currently located in the Public Safety Building that will swing into the Historic Courthouse include: eight criminal courtrooms, one traffic courtroom, Justice Point, Post-Conviction Motions, Public Defender Satellite Office, and Behavioral Consultants, Inc. Satellite Office.

The strategy also factored in off-site needs, renovation to the Historic Courthouse, and ongoing operating costs when comparing options. The design team is prioritizing a strategy that avoids disruption to elected offices during the swing space timeframe. Ultimately, the swing space plan considers the long-term master plan and ensures moves align with the vision for maximizing Historic Courthouse use post-construction of the new building. Design consultants are using this methodology to designate a swing type for each department, office, and tenant of the Historic Courthouse.

Swing Types

Type 1 – As-Is Final

Remains in existing location for both swing and final occupancy. No moves required.

Type 2 – As-Is Swing

Remains in existing location for swing only. Moves out to new Criminal Courthouse or to final location based on Master Plan.

Type 3 – As-Is Final + Downsize

Remains in existing location and downsizes to meet final program needs.

Type 4 – Relocate to Final

Relocated within Historic Courthouse to final location and sized to meet final program.

Type 5 – Relocate For Swing Only

Relocate to Historic Courthouse for Swing Phase only.

Type 6 – Partial or Full Offsite Relocation Required

Requires offsite relocation to enable remainder of swing to occur.

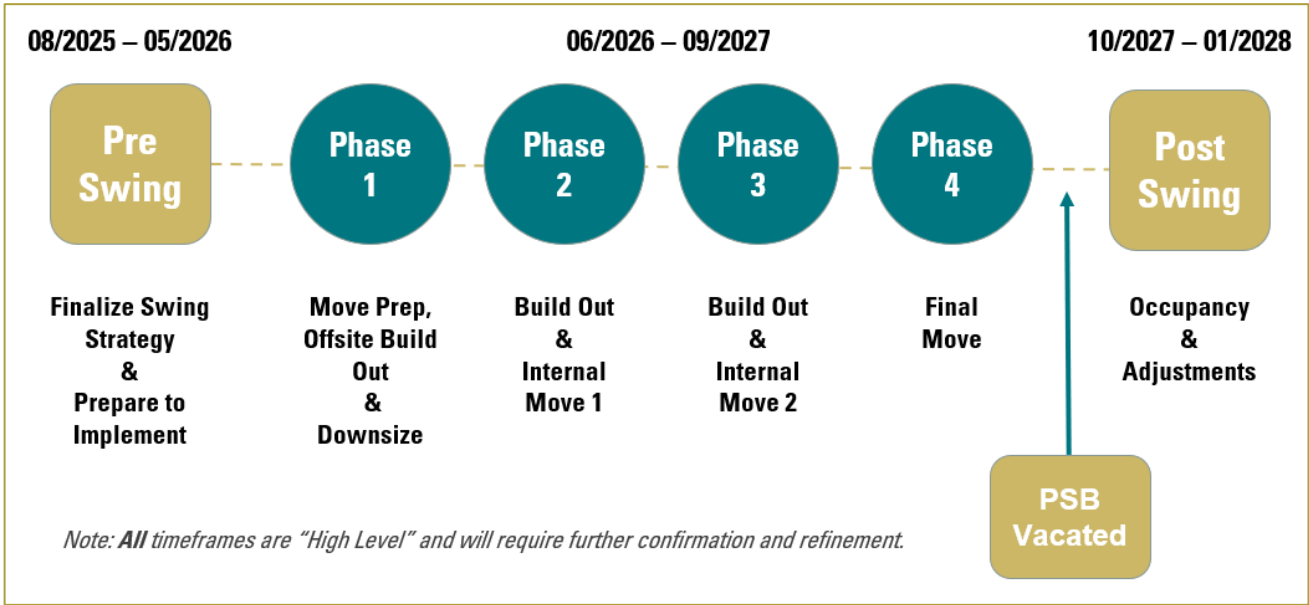
Type 7 – Re-Allocated Court Functions

Existing court spaces to remain as-is and be re-named/re-allocated to make room for Criminal Court functions.

The project team conducted individual meetings with elected officials and cabinet members to review the strategic approach relevant to their departments and to collect input on functional

and operational requirements. Departments and offices under consideration for off-site relocation were engaged in detailed discussions to ensure thoughtful planning and minimize service disruption. Off-site programming has been finalized, and the IJCC project team will initiate outreach to all Courthouse Complex tenants during 2026.

Diagram A: Anticipated Swing Phases and Timeline (as of November 2025)



The due diligence that went into this strategy focused on ensuring community members and constituents would experience as little disruption as possible during the swing phase. The plan as proposed reduces risk of service disruptions and keeps court and other public services centralized in the Historic Courthouse. For the most part, residents can count on conducting business with the County as they typically would during swing, demolition, and construction phases.

Pre-design activities also continue with the project's design and construction team looking forward to drafts of a 75% conceptual design package in the coming months, including blocking and stacking as well as floor plan options. Master planning for the Historic Courthouse is underway, focusing on highest-and-best-use strategies for that building. As part of this effort, the County is prioritizing strategies to make full and efficient use of the Historic Courthouse. The goal is to determine which services and offices can continue to operate effectively there, reserving the new facility for only those functions that require purpose-built spaces. This approach will help control construction costs, avoid creating excess capacity in the new building, and reduce the risk of significant vacant spaces in the Historic Courthouse.

Conceptual design is anticipated to be completed in the second quarter of 2026. This milestone will translate programming requirements and master planning work into more defined site layouts, building forms, and spatial relationships. By refining the size, configuration, and scope of the overall project, the conceptual design work will enable the

project team to prepare more accurate construction cost estimates based on specific systems, materials, and building features. These firmer estimates will allow Milwaukee County to understand the overall capital financial requirements and will be the foundation for the project's 2027 capital budget request – the project's first significant request for capital construction funding. The 2027 request will move the project into schematic design and, ultimately, construction. The project team will present a full fiscal impact report to the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors in the July 2026 board cycle or sooner.

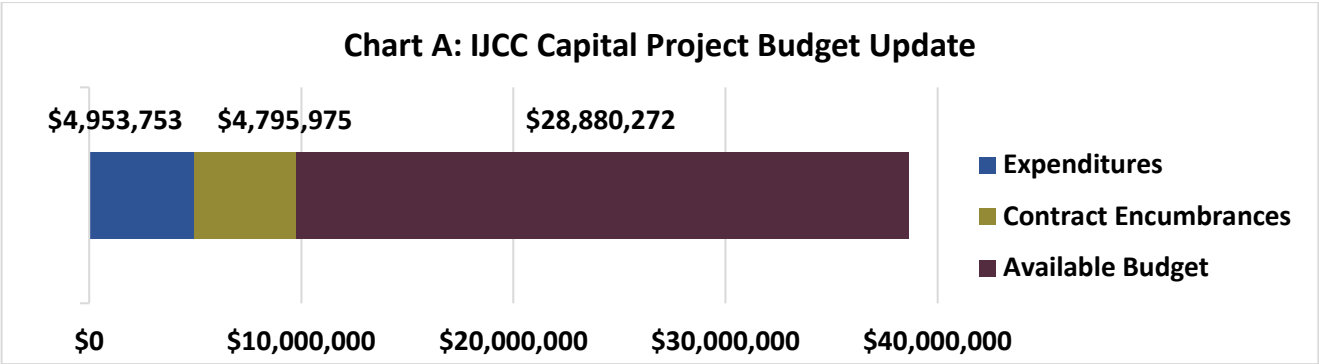
Funding & Finance

Milwaukee County advanced a funding request for the IJCC project as part of the 2025–27 State Biennial Budget process, emphasizing both the urgent need to replace the Public Safety Building and the County's unique role in delivering costly state-mandated services.

As referenced in File 25-573, the County advanced a creative compromise that acknowledged the shared responsibility for delivering state-mandated services, specifically expressway patrol through the Sheriff's Office. Legislators agreed to provide direct state funding for Milwaukee County's expressway patrol services, thereby creating uniformity with other counties, while freeing up equivalent local resources to be applied toward the IJCC project.

The adopted state biennial budget included increases of \$18 million in the first year and \$20 million in the second year for this purpose. The Milwaukee County 2026 Adopted Capital Improvements Budget acknowledged this revenue and includes a \$15,820,000 allocation for planning and design for IJCC. This amount allows the County to avoid disruption to these processes, keeping the project on track for relocation, demolition, and new construction as soon as 2027-2032.

In September 2025, File 25-583 recognized current year expressway policing aids from the state budget to add an additional \$7.5 million to the project. The County Board approved a combined FY2024/FY2025 project budget of \$22.8 million for Courthouse Complex planning under Project WC0276011. Funds have been encumbered and expended as detailed in Chart A for planning and design efforts. The remaining funds will be allocated for a Construction Manager, cost validation consultant, and other technical needs.



Stakeholder and Community Engagement

Internal engagement efforts are focused on establishing regular touchpoints with occupants of the Public Safety Building and Historic Courthouse, preparing departments for swing space transitions and supporting leaders with operational and procedural changes.

Externally, the County has continued comprehensive community engagement through roadshows, courthouse tours, Milwaukee County budget listening sessions, and tools such as a [video tour](#) (available in English and Spanish). Recent outreach included a presentation to Wisconsin Community Services employees.

Justice Policy and Program Alignment

In partnership with the National Center for State Courts (NCSC), the County conducted a collaborative values-setting process that engaged justice system leaders, system-involved stakeholders, and community members through surveys, focus groups, and interviews. The County will work with the Community Justice Council, lead justice policy and programs partner, to embed the recommendations from this exercise into next steps related to the programmatic opportunities and building design features.

II. Project Timeline

Conceptual Design and Master Planning is underway and expected to be completed in the second quarter of 2026. Future design phases include Schematic Design (June 2026–April 2027), and Design Development (April 2027–January 2028). These phases will build upon programming outputs and align project scope with available resources. Regular updates will be provided as each phase progresses. Phase IV of this work spans multiple years as outlined below.

Table A: Estimated Project Timeline

Phase	Initiation	Closing
Intake and Planning	Q2 2024	Q4 2025
Design Phase	Q4 2024	Q4 2028
Justice Policy & Program Action Planning	Q3 2024	Sustained in CJC
Process Improvement	Q4 2024	Q1 2026
Pre-Construction	Q4 2024	Q2 2028
Swing Space Relocation	Q3 2027	Q1 2028
Safety Building Demolition	Q1 2028	Q1 2029
New Justice Facility Construction	Q1 2029	Q1 2032
Historic Courthouse Renovation	Q1 2032	Q1 2033

As stated, capital funding for a portion of relocation, demolition, and construction expenses are expected to be requested in the 2027 budget cycle and reflect state contributions. Capital construction funding requests will span multiple fiscal years. The Board will be kept up to date on funding requests through regular reports from Administration. The next expected report is planned for March 2026.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department of Administrative Services and the Office of Strategy, Budget and Performance respectfully request that this informational report be received and placed on file.

FISCAL EFFECT

The report is informational only and there is no fiscal impact.

PREPARED BY:

Aaron Hertzberg, Director of Administrative Services

Carl Ashley, Chief Judge, First Judicial District

Ashley Adsit, Director of Project & Performance Management, SBP-PMO

Claire Miller, Senior Manager, SBP-PMO

Peter Nilles, Director, Facilities Planning, DAS-Facilities Management

Jeremy Lucas, Policy Director, SBP-PMO

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

Describe how the item aligns to the objectives in the strategic plan:

3A: Invest “upstream” to address root causes of health disparities

3B: Enhance the County’s fiscal health and sustainability

3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities