

**MILWAUKEE COUNTY**  
Inter-Office Communication

Date: February 13, 2026

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](#), [25-582](#), and [25-737](#).

**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The existing Courthouse Complex facilities are severely outdated and, in some cases, functionally obsolete, presenting significant public safety and security issues.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.

### Justice Policy and Program Alignment

The IJCC project is intentionally designed to improve justice system outcomes, not solely to construct new facilities. With leadership from the Community Justice Council (CJC), the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) led a collaborative values-setting process in 2025. This included a working session with justice system leaders, a public survey and outreach to system-involved stakeholders, a series of focus groups, and one-on-one interviews.

The core values identified through NCSC’s engagement with system leaders translated into tangible design and operational decisions as outlined in Table A.

**Table A: IJCC Justice Policy and Programs: Values Setting**

Value	How This Value Is Built into the Project
<b>Safety and Security</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Three-way separation for public, staff, and in custody throughout the new building</li> <li>▪ One entrance into the building for the public with security screening</li> </ul>
<b>Accessibility and Efficiency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ New signage and digital displays for improved wayfinding</li> <li>▪ Use technology and virtual resources to improve court access</li> </ul>
<b>Collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Social hubs and meeting spaces planned for in the new facility and the historic courthouse</li> </ul>
<b>Trust</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Offering multiple avenues for community updates and feedback, including surveys, tours, presentations, roadshows, website, and a shared inbox</li> </ul>

Value	How This Value Is Built into the Project
<b>Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Create private areas for system-impacted families and individuals, including respite rooms and attorney-client meeting spaces</li> </ul>
<b>Transparency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Utilizing a three-pronged decision-making framework for IJCC project decisions, balancing stakeholder feedback, fiscal feasibility, and best practices</li> </ul>
<b>Innovation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Allocate space for problem-solving courts</li> </ul>

A dedicated problem-solving courts floor is a central component of this strategy, supporting participant dignity, collaboration across justice partners, accountability, access to treatment and services, and flexibility for evolving court models. The CJC is serving as a key partner in defining program goals, informing operational and service delivery needs, and shaping a long-term strategy for problem-solving courts in Milwaukee County.

Ongoing engagement with the CJC and justice partners will continue throughout 2026 as conceptual design is finalized and future phases advance.

## Design & Construction Progress

### ***Conceptual Design & Master Planning***

Conceptual design and Historic Courthouse master planning continue to advance in an integrated approach, aligning swing space needs, long-term operational efficiency, and justice system outcomes. Since the last report, the project’s design and construction team reviewed and provided feedback on a 75% conceptual design package that included blocking and stacking as well as floor plan options. Design feedback is being informed by operational data, peer comparisons, and process improvement efforts related to court scheduling and service delivery. Overall, the project team is focusing on design progress through a systems outcome and fiscal impact lens.

Fiscal considerations are embedded throughout the design process. To date, the project and consulting teams implemented strategies that include challenging program square footage, maximizing use of the Historic Courthouse in lieu of additional swing space or expanded new construction, managing long-term operating costs, improving energy efficiency, and eliminating deferred maintenance associated with the Public Safety Building. Design decisions to date have resulted in more than \$100 million in estimated cost avoidance.

Since the 30% conceptual design milestone, key design changes include the relocation of select programs into the Historic Courthouse, reductions in courtroom and jury deliberation room counts, and refinement of support spaces. Jury deliberation room quantity was informed by Milwaukee County trial data and peer courthouse comparisons, resulting in a ratio that balances operational efficiency, fiscal responsibility, and stakeholder input.

Conceptual design is anticipated to reach 100% completion in the second quarter of 2026. This milestone will translate programming requirements 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 2027 request will move the project into schematic design and, ultimately, construction.

Key elements under development that will influence system outcomes include a dedicated problem-solving courts floor, respite and attorney-client meeting spaces, improved public entry and wayfinding, and efficient court configurations that support three-way separation between the public, staff, and in-custody individuals. These components reflect feedback received from the community, justice involved individuals, staff, advocates/partners, etc. These solutions were created in response to major pain points and trauma experienced by individuals who have engaged with the justice system in the Milwaukee County Courthouse Complex.

Master planning for the Historic Courthouse is underway, focusing on highest-and-best-use strategies for that building. As part of this effort, the design consultants are working to delineate priorities that are necessary, enabling, or complimentary to the IJCC project as compared to those that should be embedded in longer-term capital improvement plans. 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.

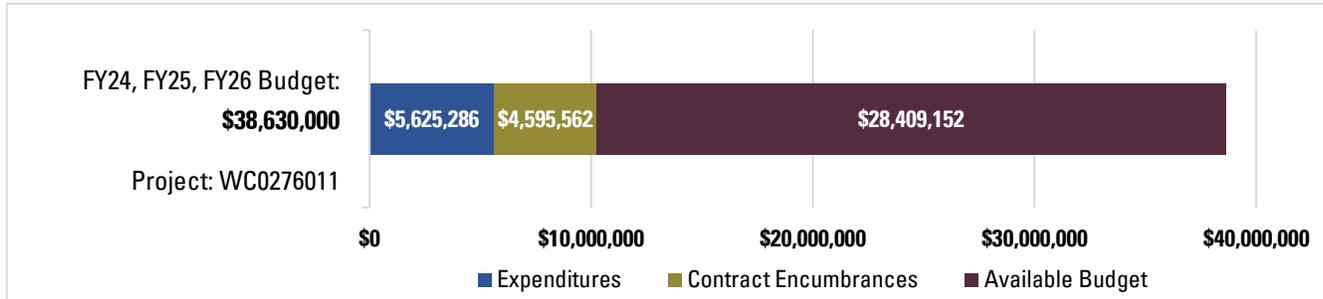
## **Funding & Finance**

Milwaukee County successfully advanced funding for IJCC through the 2025–27 State Biennial Budget. As part of a legislative compromise, the State provided direct funding for expressway patrol services, allowing the County to redirect equivalent local resources toward the IJCC project. Key funding milestones include:

- \$18 million (Year 1) and \$20 million (Year 2) in state support
- \$15.82 million included in the 2026 Adopted Capital Improvements Budget for planning and design
- An additional \$7.5 million recognized through File [25-583](#)

The life-to-date project budget totals \$38.6 million under Project WC0276011 as shown in Chart A below. Available funds will support contracts for construction management, cost validation, and technical consulting services.

## Chart A: IJCC Capital Project Budget



A comprehensive fiscal impact report addressing operating costs, debt capacity, capital backlog, and countywide fiscal impacts is planned for presentation to the Board in July 2026 or sooner. This report will be provided in collaboration with the Office of Strategy, Budget & Performance, Office of the Comptroller, and Department of Administrative Services.

### Stakeholder and Community Engagement

Internal engagement remains focused on preparing Courthouse Complex tenants for swing space transitions, supporting operational changes, and maintaining continuity of services. Departments have been engaged through targeted meetings, space planning discussions, and early change management efforts. Additionally, a records disposition project will launch to provide departments with additional support through the SBP Project Management Office.

Externally, the County continues to engage community members, justice partners, and elected officials through courthouse tours, community presentations, budget listening sessions, roadshows, and multilingual communication tools. A refined 2026 communications strategy will emphasize system outcomes, sustainability, fiscal health, and transparency, and will include quarterly Board updates, new Supervisor orientation sessions, media engagement, budget hearings, and community gatherings. Through this work, the stakeholder engagement work group is focused on ensuring an understanding of and connection to the IJCC project by community members and policymakers.

## 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**

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Initiation</b>	<b>Closing</b>
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	Q1 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 Q2 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
- Erin Perkins, Project Manager, 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