

**MILWAUKEE COUNTY**  
Inter-Office Communication

Date: May 21, 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

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**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](#), [25-737](#), [26-315](#), [26-445](#), and [26-425](#).

**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The existing Courthouse Complex facilities are severely outdated and, in some cases, functionally obsolete, presenting significant public safety and security issues.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 which was reinvigorated in 2024. 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.

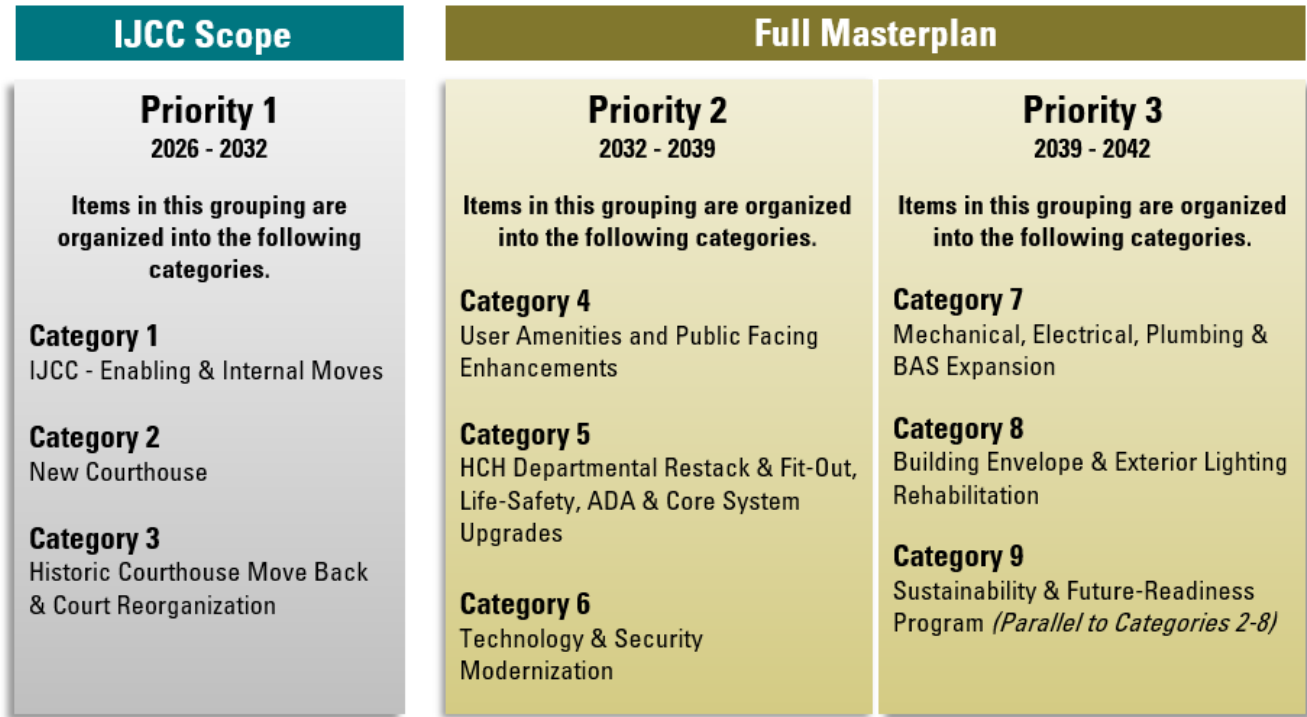
As the conceptual design phase concludes, this report is focused on sharing the 100% conceptual design that has been presented to Milwaukee County by the design team, after thorough consultation with internal departments, Courthouse Complex occupants, system partners, community members, etc.

Since the last report, the project’s design and construction team reviewed and provided feedback on a 100% 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.

## **Design & Construction**

As previously stated, the IJCC project is structured as a phased, long-term implementation strategy that balances immediate courthouse replacement needs with broader modernization of the entire Courthouse Complex. The sequencing framework organizes work into three priority groupings that align construction timing, operational readiness, and long-term capital planning.

## Diagram A: Conceptual Priorities



**Priority 1 work** (2026-2032) represents the core IJCC scope and focuses on activities necessary to deliver and occupy the new courthouse facility. This phase includes enabling and internal moves required to prepare existing facilities and swing spaces for construction activities. It also includes demolition of the existing Public Safety Building, construction of the new courthouse, and associated infrastructure improvements. Following completion of the new courthouse, this phase concludes with relocation activities and reorganization of court operations within the Historic Courthouse. These efforts are organized into three categories: (1) enabling and internal moves, (2) new courthouse construction, and (3) Historic Courthouse move-back and court reorganization.

Once the new courthouse becomes operational, **Priority 2 work** is anticipated to occur between 2032 and 2039 as part of the broader Courthouse Complex master plan. These projects focus on modernization and optimization of the Historic Courthouse and related facilities. Planned improvements include public-facing amenities and user experience enhancements, departmental restacking and fit-out efforts within the Historic Courthouse, life-safety and ADA upgrades, and technology and security modernization initiatives. These efforts are organized into Categories 4 through 6 and are intended to improve long-term operational efficiency, accessibility, safety, and functionality across the complex.

**Priority 3 work** (2039 and beyond) focuses on major building systems rehabilitation and future-readiness investments necessary to support the long-term sustainability of the Courthouse Complex. This work includes mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and building automation system expansions; exterior envelope and lighting rehabilitation; and sustainability-focused initiatives intended to improve energy performance and resilience. The

sustainability and future-readiness program is anticipated to run in parallel with several earlier master plan phases to ensure coordination with other planned capital improvements.

This phased sequencing strategy allows Milwaukee County to prioritize the most urgent operational and safety needs while aligning long-term investments with fiscal capacity, operational continuity, and broader master planning goals for the Courthouse Complex.

## Justice Policy & Programs and 100% Conceptual Design

The IJCC project is intentionally designed to improve justice system outcomes, not solely to construct new facilities. The design continues to be influenced by the **Justice Policy & Programs** work that is supported by the Milwaukee Community Justice Council and the National Center for State Courts (NCSC). This collaborative led a values-setting process in 2025 that 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 through implementation of the following values:

- ▶ Safety & Security
- ▶ Accessibility/  
Efficiency
- ▶ Collaboration
- ▶ Trust
- ▶ Community
- ▶ Transparency
- ▶ Innovation

As shown in the accompanying presentation, many of the priorities elevated through the Justice Policy & Programs work is applicable to the building design. Key elements 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.

Lastly, a dedicated problem-solving courts floor is a central component to influence justice system outcomes, supporting participant dignity, collaboration across justice partners, accountability, access to treatment and services, and flexibility for evolving court models.

**Key design changes since the 75% design** involved Judicial Suite Chambers, expansion of lobby pre-screening, relocation of the tunnel connection from parking, second entry from MacArthur Square, reduction of jury management area to provide a conference/training room, refinement of building operations and Central Utility Plant requirements, right-sizing of shared court support functions, and improvements to access to the loading dock and waste management.

Additionally, the conceptual design gross square footage is currently estimated at 463,317. The Design & Construction work group continues to proceed with the following timeline.

**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
Enabling Phase Relocation	Q2 2027	Q2 2028
Safety Building Demolition	Q2 2028	Q1 2029
New Courthouse Construction	Q2 2028	Q2 2032
Historic Courthouse Renovation	Q1 2032	Q1 2033

### **Funding & Finance**

The life-to-date project budget totals \$38.6 million under Project WC0276011 as shown in Chart A below. Available funds support contracts for construction management, cost validation, and technical consulting services. The State is also providing direct funding for expressway patrol services that was intended to allow the County to redirect equivalent local resources toward the IJCC project (\$18 million in Year 1 and \$20 million in Year 2 in state support). That redirection could help reduce the impact on local taxpayers. Administration expects to request the capital funding for a portion of relocation, demolition, and construction expenses in 2026.

A comprehensive fiscal impact report addressing operating costs, debt capacity, capital backlog, and countywide fiscal impacts is planned for presentation to the Board of Supervisors in July 2026. A series of reports in the May, June and July board cycles will be presented in collaboration with the Office of Strategy, Budget & Performance, Office of the Comptroller, and Department of Administrative Services to ensure policymakers have the necessary information for this complex endeavor that represents the largest capital project in Milwaukee County history.

### **Stakeholder and Community Engagement**

Stakeholder engagement efforts for the Investing in Justice: Courthouse Complex (IJCC) project continue to focus on both community outreach and internal coordination. Community

engagement activities include ongoing education and outreach efforts through presentations, roadshows, tours, public sessions, and onboarding of new stakeholders. The project team also plans to distribute regular project communications, reinvigorate coalition partnerships, and strengthen media messaging to underscore the value and long-term impact of the project. In parallel, the County and project partners continue advancing strategic planning efforts in collaboration with the National Center for State Courts (NCSC).

Internal engagement efforts remain focused on maintaining strong coordination with County leadership and supporting project partners as the project transitions toward enabling phase activities. This includes providing communication resources, operational updates, and change management support to prepare stakeholders for future relocation, construction, and implementation activities.

## **II. Next Steps**

As stated, capital funding for a portion of relocation, demolition, and construction expenses are expected to be requested in 2027 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 July 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:**

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### **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