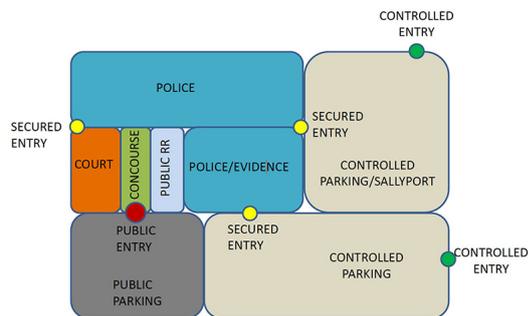


Eagerly awaiting a new justice complex

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
Friday, 14 October 2022 05:25

CONCEPTUAL BUILDING DIAGRAM



No more rain pouring in and ruining workstations during monsoons. No more light coming in through cracks in the building. Hardwired technology. More private spaces for sensitive conversations. And just generally enough space to get work done efficiently and comfortably.

Those are some of the things Gallup Police Chief Franklin Boyd is looking forward to when the new John B. Arviso Department of Public Safety Facility And Municipal Courts building is ready.

That's probably a year or two off, but city officials are hoping construction can start this year. The project is expected to take 480 calendar days from groundbreaking to completion. Plans have been in the works since 2019 and the city council approved the \$25 million construction contract Sept. 13.

"It is quite literally falling apart. You can see daylight through the roof," Planning and Development Director C.B. Strain told the council that night.

The old police and municipal court building was built in 1971. To put that in perspective, Richard Nixon was president. The top song of the year was Three Dog Night's "Joy To the World." A brand new VW Beetle cost \$1,780.

It was just three years after astronauts landed on the moon and the first 911 emergency lines

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went active. Things that weren't a thing yet include disco, the Commodore 64, barcode scanners, Pong, Blockbuster and Prozac.

That means over the years a lot of technology, from computers to surveillance cameras, had to be retrofitted at the station. Holes had to be drilled and things had to be wired. To this day, officers can't get cell phone reception in parts of the building.

In fact, the department moved out of the facility and into the county Law Enforcement Center for a while in 2009. The plan was that the city would lease space in the sheriff's facility indefinitely, but Boyd said the space was too small so he wasn't unhappy when the city ultimately opted out.

"I do not want to run into the same problem we had at the Law Enforcement Center, of not having the square footage we needed or room to grow," he said. "We're trying to make sure we don't go back to the drawing board in that regard."

Technology alone will give the new facility a huge leap into the future, but it will also have more space for the present, plus room to grow. The old facility is 39,000 square feet, split between the police department (29,056 square feet) and the municipal court (7,718 square feet) and a separate, 2,000 square foot training facility, which Boyd said was "basically a big classroom."

The new one will be 41,213 square feet over two stories with 65 public parking spaces, compared to the 44 there now.

Plans originally called for 46,159 square feet and two elevators, but about 5,000 square feet and one elevator were "value engineered" out of the plans because of cost increases since the facility was originally planned. The city also opted for a few less expensive finish materials and different construction for the new impound lot when it goes in.

Boyd's not the only one looking forward to the new facility.

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“We’ve been waiting and hoping that it was going to happen, so it’s exciting to see that this is finally going to start,” Municipal Court Judge Janell Griego said.

The new courtroom will be roomier, and Griego and her staff will get more secure parking and entry.

“We’re going to have our own entrance,” Griego said. “Now I walk in through the public entrance. I walk right past all the defendants as they’re waiting. The entrance alone is going to be a lot safer.”

And then there are the conveniences. “We’ve had to deal with roof leaks, toilets that don’t flush. My staff doesn’t even have running water in their current break room. We have no hot water at all in the building,” Griego said.

Now the biggest obstacles to construction are economic and logistical. The plan was conceived before the COVID-19 pandemic, and since then the costs of materials, labor and interest have all gone up while availability has gone down.

“There’s so many variables for this project, with the supply shortage, delivery, back orders,” Boyd said. “It’s unfortunate, when the building was finalized, the materials were an issue. The cost increases were an issue. We made it happen. Unfortunately now it’s just a time issue.”

The project will start with razing the training center and impound lot beside the existing headquarters.

“The construction of the new public safety building will be directly behind the current building,” Boyd said. “The way we are going to make that work is that the new structure will be a two-story building, so it will have a smaller land footprint. We used the space very effectively going to the two-story.”

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Once the new facility is ready, the police department and municipal court will move in and the existing facility will be bulldozed. The space will be used for more parking, the new impound lot and a K-9 space.

Boyd made a special shout-out to the city's lobbyists and others who secured grant funding for the project. That includes separate state legislative appropriations of \$6 million, over \$4 million and \$1.5 million, minus a 10% set-aside for Arts in Public Places. The balance is coming from bonding \$12.8 million and the city kicking in \$2.5 million.

Now it's just waiting for construction to start. The department is eager for it.

"When you have adequate and useful work spaces, it really helps our officers and detectives," Boyd said. "We're literally moving into a brand new building instead of a dilapidated facility. That's what we're looking forward to, improving the overall work environment for our office. It'll be great for morale. They won't have to use space heaters any more and they won't have to worry about rain."

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