

## New Madera County Courthouse anticipated

-- Madera County Superior Court

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Although they must wait three years, Madera County judges and attorneys are looking forward to having a new \$100 million courthouse to call home.

Their current home, a twice-condemned former elementary school building built in 1911, has been the county courthouse for the past 55 years.

The first step in the courthouse construction process happened in early June as the Veterans Memorial Building in Madera was torn down to make room for the new building.

"The funds for the new courthouse are coming from court user fees," Madera County Superior Court Judge Charles Wieland said. "The funds exist and have been set aside for Madera. It is a success story in that, when the judicial branch of government said in 2002 that we want a new Madera courthouse, we, as a statewide court system, established a fee system to pay for it. The money does not come from the general fund."

Wieland said the city of Madera has been a partner in making the dream a reality.

"The city, through Jim Taubert and the Redevelopment Agency, has taken title to four of the five parcels that make up the site immediately south of the Madera County Courthouse Museum, between Sixth and Seventh streets," he said.

The fifth parcel is owned by Madera County. The county plans to move its vehicle-maintenance garage from the site to a new location and give title of the parcel to the city. The city will then transfer title of the entire parcel to the state.

"This is a state, not a county, courthouse," Wieland said.

The four-story, 123,000-square-foot building will have 10 courtrooms.

A basement will provide for limited parking and prisoner entry and storage. An above-ground parking structure will provide 260 spaces.

The courthouse will respect the historic 100-year-old courthouse across the street and pay homage to Yosemite Valley and serve as an anchor development in downtown Madera.

"The new courthouse will be designed to be as environmentally friendly as possible," Wieland said, "using local Raymond granite and wood from Central Valley trees.

Its southern rear exposure will take advantage of the southern sun year-round, and natural light will filter into the building as much as possible.

"The design of the new court seeks to reflect the dignity of the justice system and the respect that Californians have for it," Wieland said. The building will be formal yet reflect the irregularities of Mother Nature rather than the ornateness of big-city public buildings.

"This means that rather than having one large building with Greco-Roman columns, we will have four vertical stacks separated by glass, much like the large rocks of Yosemite Valley are separated by the waters of the Merced River," Wieland said. "These four vertical stacks will be connected by four horizontal floors."

In addition to being beautiful, Wieland said, the building will be practical and functional.

"We are still designing the interior layout," he said. "The discussion has been as broadly based as asking whether the criminal courts should be on the fourth floor or the second floor and how many electrical outlets should each office have."

In 2001, Madera County Supervisor Vern Moss and Judge Wieland testified before the California Senate Judiciary Committee regarding the need for a new courthouse in Madera.

Moss graduated from the last graduating class when the existing building was still a school.