

Struggling with hundreds of millions of dollars in budget cuts to the branch, the Judicial Council made some painful decisions in their two day meeting. They cancelled plans to build new courthouses in Alpine and Sierra counties, lopping off \$50 million dollars from the list. And they agreed to proceed on 39 other projects this fiscal year, funded under Senate Bill 1407. But their budgets will be reduced 4%, saving another \$160 million.

Then the chair of the Court Facilities Working Group announced: there's a new courthouse cost reduction committee.

Hon. Brad Hill, Chair, Court Facilities Working Group *"The name of this committee really says it all. It's not the cost review subcommittee, or the cost analysis subcommittee. It's the courthouse cost reduction subcommittee. That is their mandate and we expect to see significant savings over the coming months and years."*

Plus, an independent analyst will review the entire court construction program, then report to the Court Facilities Working Group. And there's a pilot project underway, to decentralize court maintenance.

Hon. Brad Hill, Chair, Court Facilities Working Group *"If a court is capable of doing it, if we can fund it properly, and they'd like to do it, then we think that that's a model that should be pursued."*

Justice Hill also debunked the incorrect interpretations of a courthouse maintenance planning list.

Hon. Brad Hill, Chair, Court Facilities Working Group *"There are no \$2,500 closets being painted, or in the works; or there never will be quite frankly a \$2,500 paint job on a closet. But this placeholder list, instead of saying simply 'cost to be determined' gave the impression that perhaps there were such closets being painted."*

Justice Hill says the list will be revamped and resubmitted to the Council, to prevent future confusion and misplaced criticism.

The presiding judge in San Joaquin said her court is in crisis now after decades of inadequate funding. She pressed the council for \$2 million in supplemental funding.

Hon. Robin Appel, Presiding Judge, San Joaquin Superior Court *"Quite simply San Joaquin County is out of options and this emergency funding is our life line to continue to provide access to justice for all case types."*

Judge Rosenberg suggested granting \$1.08 million, and a \$916,000 loan which would have to be paid back.

Hon David Rosenberg, Judicial Council *"That would be I think an appropriate way to go and would be a good steward of the relatively small amount that we have available."*

Hon. Robin Appel, Presiding Judge, San Joaquin Superior Court *“If we said we’d take it as a loan we would be lying because we would never pay it back to you. It would not be possible unless miracles happen in the state.”*

The Council approved the hybrid package, part grant and part loan.

And they set legislative priorities for 2012, with the budget at the top of the list. The branch will advocate for adequate funding to provide services to the public and keep courts open, for funding for additional judgeships to handle the work load, and for judges’ pension reform.

They also voted, with one abstention, to continue to oppose Assembly Bill 1208.

Curtis Child, Director, Office of Governmental Affairs *“It’s quite a sweeping measure. It intrudes upon the manner of how the judicial branch governs itself.”*

That measure may be considered on the Assembly floor in January.

The California Court Case Management oversight committee reported: they’re making progress on exploring a possible partnership with a private foundation.

Meantime, judicial officers are performance testing CCMS.

Council members also accepted a report on the foster care program, the final report of the Bench Bar Media Committee, and they approved new metrics to update estimates of statewide judicial needs. Details of these and other Council business: on the court’s website.

I’m Leanne Kozak reporting in San Francisco for California Courts News.