

Planning for the new courthouse in Yolo County is moving right along. This city block in downtown Woodland has just been approved for acquisition by the State Public Works Board. Presiding Judge Rosenberg says a new courthouse is long overdue.

Hon. David Rosenberg, Yolo Superior Court Presiding Judge *“We’re sort of the poster child in California for courtroom facilities that are deficient.”*

The main courthouse is on the National Register of Historic Places, built in 1917 to serve about 25,000 people. More than 200,000 live here now, making almost 400,000 court visits each year. They line up outside on slippery steps in all kinds of weather.

Inside, clerks are jammed into tiny work spaces, files are crammed in everywhere. There’s no place to store supplies, so they stash them in the old walk-in safes. This network closet doubles as a break room for folks who provide perimeter screening. And don’t look for a public restroom on the first floor – there is none.

Shawn Landry, Assistant Court Executive Officer *“So if the public needs to use the rest room they have to take our only elevator in the building which has been out :three times just this month.”*

The public areas have no air conditioning – in a town that gets up over a hundred degrees many summer days.

Andrae Randolph, Yolo Court IS Manager *“It gets really stagnant.”*

Originally there were 2 small courtrooms in this building. Certainly not ADA compliant. The old decorative cement tiles remain, but they could shake loose in an earthquake.

Over the years they carved out another 6 courtrooms like this one, less than half the size of California standards.

Hon. David Rosenberg, Yolo Superior Court Presiding Judge *“So we always have people standing through the jury selection process; not a pretty picture.”*

There are six more courtrooms and support services in seven other locations.

Hon. David Rosenberg, Yolo Superior Court Presiding Judge *“I’ve got courtrooms all over the city in trailers, in rented facilities, we’ve got courtrooms scattered throughout Woodland.”*

One of them is Department 9 across the street from the main building. It’s also the holding area for inmates bused in from the jail across town. When it’s time for court, the daily parade literally stops traffic.

Shawn Landry, Assistant Court Executive Officer *“They’re chain ganged and brought across the street here, third street, and they go in this door, through the public hallway, the same door that the judges use to leave the courthouse and go to the parking lot, the judges parking lot right there, which is also intermingled with the public parking lot.”*

A whole lot more dangerous intermingling goes on in the hallways: jurors, witnesses, victims, defendants, staff and judges all mix in together. These folks are lined up in the public hallway to report for jury service.

Hon. David Rosenberg, Yolo Superior Court Presiding Judge *“In the new courthouse, there’ll be separate pathways for the public, for people who’re charged with crime in custody, for courthouse staff and judges, the way it should be.”*

And all court business will be consolidated in a safe place under one roof.

Hon. David Rosenberg, Yolo Superior Court Presiding Judge *“What a wonderful thing for the community, to be able to do one stop shopping; to be in one building where all services all courtrooms will be available.”*

As soon as the city and the Administrative Office of the Courts close escrow on the site, the architects go to work. A grand opening for the 163-thousand square foot courthouse is planned for 2015.

I’m Leanne Kozak reporting in Yolo County for California Courts News.