

Task Force on Court Facilities Lays Groundwork for Improvements

The Oregon State Bar, the Oregon Judicial Department (OJD) and the Association of Oregon Counties (AOC) created the Joint Task Force on Court Facilities in 1992 to address short- and long-term issues related to court facilities and the support services needed to operate them. That task force operated until 1999, and while it did have some accomplishments it was never able to establish dedicated funding mechanisms for court facilities or settle on a statutory definition for “suitable and sufficient court facilities.” While legislative efforts were made to create a new task force in 2001, 2003 and 2005, none were successful.

The ad hoc Task Force on Court Facilities was created in 2006 as a collaborative endeavor by Paul De Muniz, then chief justice of the Oregon Supreme Court, former OSB President Dennis Rawlinson and Ben Boswell, former AOC president. The task force was co-chaired by De Muniz, Gerry Gaydos, who was then incoming OSB president, and former Lane County Commissioner Bobby Green. Members included representatives from the courts, counties and the state bar, as well as staff from the governor’s office, state legislators and representatives from the Oregon State Sheriffs’ Association.

The Task Force on Court Facilities set the goal of making recommendations in several areas:

- What, if any, modifications would be required to state court facilities to ensure that the needs of the judicial system were met in coming years.
- Whether changes in facility utilization could alleviate the need for additional state court facilities.
- The costs of implementing changes in state court facilities.
- Options for ownership and costs of leasing state court facilities by OJD.
- Whether the state should be responsible for maintaining, improving and/or replacing state court facilities and for constructing new facilities.
- Options for state and county financing.

The methodology used by the task force included statewide surveys of trial court administrators, presiding judges, county administrators and attorneys. It was determined that a comprehensive, professional survey of all state court facilities would be required to develop a reliable estimate of the cost to repair and replace state court facilities as needed. However, preliminary modeling used by the task force estimated a total cost between \$228 million and \$528 million in 2006 dollars. The task force recommended that a “detailed planning” be undertaken during the 2007-09 biennium to arrive at a more accurate assessment, a project that would require detailed architectural assessment and a detailed set of court facility standards.

Source: *The Interim Committee on Court Facilities final report (2009).*