

Polk County Board of Supervisors Office News



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Election date set to consider public safety, security and space needs of the Courts

DES MOINES, Iowa – July 23, 2013 — The Polk County Board of Supervisors took action today to set a referendum date which will be part of the existing municipal election scheduled for Tuesday, November 5, 2013. The question that will appear before the voters asks should Polk County be authorized to issue its General Obligation Bonds in an amount not to exceed \$81 million dollars (to be borrowed in phases) for the purpose of paying costs of improving public safety in, remodeling, reconstructing, historically rehabilitating, furnishing and equipping the buildings of the Polk County Judicial System, including the Historic Courthouse, the Criminal Court Annex (former Main Jail), and the Polk County Justice Center Annex (former JC Penney/Wellmark Building)? The total project cost is estimated at \$89,160,000, which includes the aforementioned improvements, the costs of issuing the bonds, acquisition costs, and expansion and renovation of the County Attorneys' office space within the Polk County Justice Center Annex. Costs above the bonded amount shall be paid from available County funds.

"We have studied this issue since 2006, have looked at multiple plans, listened to the public's concerns from the failed referendum in 2008 and believe this plan is the most reasonable and cost effective approach to alleviate the public safety, security, space and renovation needs of our courts", stated project team members Supervisors Tom Hockensmith and Angela Connolly.

On April 29, 2008, a referendum to construct additional court space failed. The referendum considered a courthouse plan to address the current and future space needs of the courts. The plan included the full use and renovation of the historic courthouse and construction of a new court facility on County-owned land immediately south of the present courthouse site at a 2009 construction cost not to exceed \$127 million. By state law, Polk County is responsible to provide space for its state courts. Polk County's Courthouse was originally built in 1906 with four courtrooms.

Following the defeated referendum, the Board of Supervisors directed the County Administrator to develop a phased approach plan and financial scenario to alleviate the courts space issue based upon the recommendations of the National Center for State Courts. A Phase I Study was completed in August of 2010 and included the establishment of a criminal courts annex within the old main jail.

On May 20, 2013, the Board of Supervisors received a presentation from the National Center for State Courts and OPN Architects, Inc. outlining a master plan for the courts which includes utilizing existing downtown buildings (the old main jail and Wellmark (former JC Penney), moving court and County Attorney functions out of leased space, and provides for the critically needed renovation of the historic courthouse.

Polk County continues to provide support in alleviating issues for the state judiciary through the use of gaming revenues to accommodate space in the new Justice Center Annex for the County Attorney saving \$280,000 in lease costs, through applying for grants and partnering with the "Friends of the Polk County Courthouse" in seeking state tax credit funding for critically imperative exterior restoration of the historic courthouse.

For additional information regarding this issue, go to Quick Links, Courts Space Issue, at www.polkcountyiowa.gov.

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