

GRAFTON COUNTY PROPOSED COURTHOUSE PROJECT

How did this proposed project begin?

Over the course of a couple of years, Maintenance Supt. Jim Oakes identified and reported a number of issues with the existing courthouse through his monthly reports to the Commissioners. He urged the Commissioners to hire an Architectural firm to validate the concerns that he had identified, as he anticipated that these issues would need to be addressed.

In 2021 the Grafton County Commissioners hired EH Danson Associates PLLC, to conduct an assessment of the Grafton County Courthouse to evaluate the various issues raised by the Maintenance Superintendent and, if corroborated, ultimately determine whether it would be more economical to meet the program needs in the existing facility through renovation and/or addition or construct a new courthouse facility on the same property.

The full EH Danson Report and the Facility Concerns Document are available on the county website:

- <https://graffton-county.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/EH-Danson-Report.pdf>
- [Grafton County Courthouse - Facility Concerns \(Updated copy\).pdf](#)

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What did the EH Danson Report find?

- Overall, the building is sound and serviceable but in need of significant improvements to provide an adequate, safe, and healthy environment for the public, staff, and litigants.
- The systems that form the bulk of the infrastructure of the building including mechanical, electrical, fire alarm and security are in outdated and poor condition.
- There are numerous code compliance issues in some of the systems. For the type of use, this building is required to have an NFPA 13 compliant automatic fire suppression system (sprinklers).
- Mechanical systems are well past their serviceable life.
- Life-safety systems, including fire protection, fire suppression and fire detection systems, are insufficient or non-existent. There is currently no sprinkler system in the building.
- The electrical system is composed of outdated and unserviceable panels (Federal Pacific), which are in poor condition. Ground wiring is lacking. Wiring is inaccessible in some areas, but where visible, it showed evidence of code deficiencies and poor condition. The emergency generator does not have sufficient capacity to support the building and does not provide power for important elements such as the sewer pumps.
- The current sewer pump system only operates in alternating fashion so that both pumps are unable to operate simultaneously. To further complicate the problem, the prison pump system and courthouse pump systems does not allow both systems to operate together causing the courthouse system to back up until the prison pump completes its operation.
- Security and communications systems are limited and in need of improvement due to age. Access to wiring is limited which is a challenge for adding new technology or improving/repairing existing systems. Door access controls, surveillance systems, motion detectors and metal detectors have been installed in various places but have been noted by staff as inadequate and incomplete.
- The parking area is consolidated in a large area on the east side of the building. There are a few vehicle spaces on the west side of the building for staff, but the number is insufficient. The parking lot itself is in poor condition and needs to be replaced. Additional segregated parking should be provided for staff for security and safety. There is limited lighting for the parking area, making security at night a concern.
- The exterior building envelope has little to no capacity to resist heat gain or loss. Almost half of the exterior vertical enclosure is single-pane glass in steel frames and is failing. The lack of insulation in the perimeter enclosure creates an unhealthy and uncomfortable work environment.

New Building vs. Renovations?

EH Danson Report provided 2 Options;

Option #1 – Renovation & Addition

- In order to meet the program needs and to correct the deficiencies in the infrastructure systems (mechanical, electrical, plumbing and fire protection - MEP/FP), a significant renovation with several additions/infills of open areas will be required. This will trigger the removal of ceilings and the remediation of asbestos containing materials (ACM's). A significant quantity of interior brick masonry walls will need to be demolished. The exterior envelope will require the removal of the glass and some sort of cladding to provide a thermal barrier.
- Because of the sensitive nature of court proceedings, the security requirements for moving the public, staff, and litigants, it is inconceivable that the building could remain occupied during construction. We anticipate for a project of this magnitude a construction period of two years at the least. Facilities will need to be leased during that time period for housing the various departments. There will be a loss of income to the County from the departments that currently lease space in the building. Moving expenses to and from temporary facilities for the County departments will also be incurred.
- **Given the age, code deficiencies and poor conditions of most of the infrastructure systems, correction, expansion, and modernization of those systems will require a comprehensive remodeling affecting virtually every area and element. Very little of the existing construction is likely to remain without impact.**

Option #2 – New Building

- There is space on the site in the parking lot to the east to accommodate the construction of a new facility. This would allow the existing courthouse to remain online during construction.
- It is also possible to maintain the existing facility after the completion of the new building and repurpose it for another occupancy. This will require a significant investment but is worthy of consideration.
- Several factors come into play with this option. Initial indications are that the new structure could be two stories instead of 3 stories like the existing building. This could save costs particularly in vertical circulation elements such as stairs and elevators
- Current state-of-the-art infrastructure can be incorporated with a view to modification and expansion in the future. A significantly improved building envelope would save operating expenses and the initial cost of mechanical equipment.
- Renewable Energy systems could be incorporated into the design or at least planned for to allow ease of future installation.
- Costs related to moving expenses and leased spaces will not be incurred. The loss of lease income to the County will be avoided in this scenario.



Why was a new building chosen?

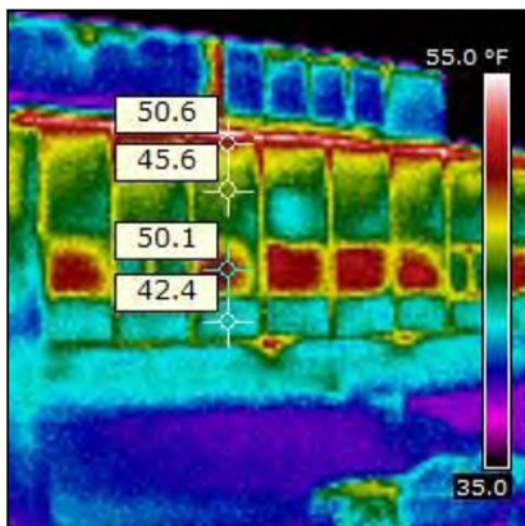
- The first reason was due to cost. People are skeptical that this could be true. The full EH Danson report is available and shows that in 2021 the renovations and additions to the existing building, to meet today's codes, have up-to-date mechanical and electric systems, and to be the appropriate size it would cost approximately \$2M more than building a new modern, energy efficient building.
- Renovations to the existing building would be significant. EH Danson's report states: **"Given the age, code deficiencies and poor conditions of most of the infrastructure systems, correction, expansion, and modernization of those systems will require a comprehensive remodeling affecting virtually every area and element. Very little of the existing construction is likely to remain without impact."**
- There are significant life safety deficiencies within the existing building that will require extensive work and be very costly to correct. The current building is also not large enough. The County Attorney's office has staff located in two (2) different buildings due to not having enough space at the Courthouse to accommodate their staff. It would not be just renovations, there is also the need to add more space to the building.

Extremely Energy Inefficient

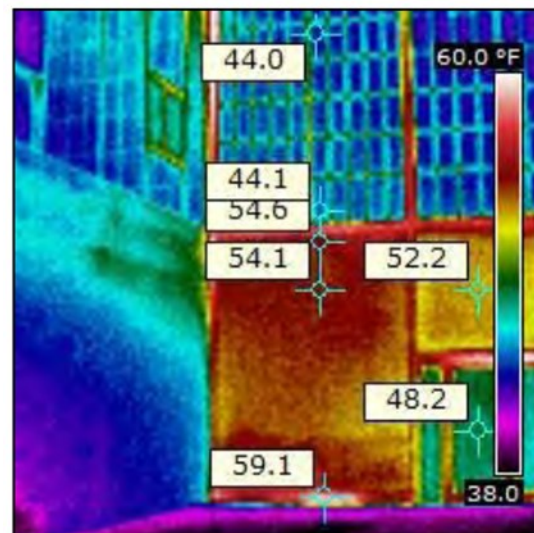
Insulation * - Other than the roof, which has 4-inches of foam insulation panels, the rest of the building's foundation, exterior brick walls, Kalwall translucent panels (fiberglass panels) and single-pane glass curtain walls are essentially uninsulated. Thermal gain in the summer is intensive.

Using an infrared camera on a 30⁰ Fahrenheit day, thermal scans from a 2009 energy audit revealed massive heat losses and assumes the same for cooling losses in the summertime. Below are a few images

South façade of Courthouse



Courthouse Entrance on North Façade



Why was a new building chosen?

- In consultation with Lavallee Brensinger, the Architectural firm we hired for the Conceptual Design phase, they estimate that a new courthouse of this size in this region uses 45% less energy than an existing one, based on national surveys of energy use. For reference, the existing courthouse is 44,662 sf, and the proposed new building is 62,414 sf. Even though the proposed building is larger, it is still anticipated that it would use 45% less energy. That will be significant operational savings.
- All Electrical & Mechanical Equipment is original to the building making it over 50 years old. All beyond its useful life. Many comments have been made about the maintenance of the building. We believe that the fact that the equipment has lasted as long as it has demonstrates that everything in the building has been maintained extremely well over the years.
- The building has a single elevator that is shared by the public and staff. In discussions with Probation and Parole, the public elevator is the only means for escorting detainees to other locations. The hydraulic public/staff elevator manufactured by Dover was installed when the building was constructed and has remained largely the same. The elevator operates at a slow rate of 85 fpm and is rated at 3,500 lb capacity on the inspection certificate. Replacement parts are unavailable for the controls. There are no firefighter controls or security controls to restrict access during prisoner transport. The elevator is lacking hands-free communication in case of emergencies. The elevator and its controls have reached their service life and should be replaced.

Why was a new building chosen?

- Segregation of Inmates & staff:
The building lacks segregation of inmates and staff. Inmates must be escorted from the DOC and through judicial staff areas for court appearances because there is no other route to avoid crossing paths.
- Inmate Holding Cells: The building lacks inmate holding cells. All inmates having court appearances must be escorted from the adjacent Dept. of Corrections (DOC) by bailiffs. Periodically, court proceedings are held up due to bailiffs & inmates being caught up in DOC lock-downs.
- Panic Alarms: The systems in place are obsolete.
- In order to renovate the building, it would need to be vacated. This would require leasing space for the county departments, this in itself would be expensive. The State would also need to find space to lease for the courts, as well as Probation and Parole. Finding spaces would be challenging and would likely lead to these functions being located in different places throughout the county. This would then cause additional expenses as the Sheriff's Department would have more frequent movement of prisoners to and from the Department of Corrections. In addition, if these departments are not located together, more travel will be incurred by the County Attorneys needing to travel to court hearings. Logistically, vacating the existing building would be very difficult and expensive.
- There are many efficiencies gained by the Courts, the Jail, the Sheriff's Department and the County Attorney's office all being housed in the same location. In addition, the county would lose the annual revenue from the State for the leases. By constructing a new building the existing courthouse can remain operational during construction alleviating all of those costs.



For all the reasons and many more the Grafton County Commissioners at that time made the decision that a new building was the most financially beneficial approach.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who will approve funding for the project?

Simple Answer: the County Convention. Grafton County has 26 State Representatives. By law, those 26 elected State Representatives will make the final decision. As they are the body that will decide whether to fund the project or not. There will be a Public Hearing and then a vote. There must be a 2/3 majority of those members present and voting in favor of the bond for the project to be approved.

New Hampshire county governments have a unique structure, separating legislative and executive powers between the County Convention and the Board of Commissioners, respectively. The County Delegation, consisting of the County's State Representatives, serves as the legislative body responsible for approving budgets. The Board of Commissioners, composed of three elected officials, acts as the executive branch, overseeing daily operations and county property.

Key Components of a New Hampshire County Government

Board of County Commissioners (Executive Branch):

- **Function:** Responsible for the supervision, custody, and care of county departments, buildings, and land, as well as budgetary oversight.
- **Structure:** A three-member body elected by district voters to staggered terms.
- **Role:** Manages day-to-day operations and acts as the primary executive authority.

County Delegation (Legislative Branch):

- **Function:** Approves the annual county budget, raises revenues, and appropriates funds for county departments.
- **Structure:** Comprises all the state representatives elected from the county's representative districts.
- **Role:** Serves as the legislative body, providing legislative authority over the county.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS cont.

What role does the State of NH play?

Grafton County leases a large amount of space within the existing Courthouse to the State of NH. We lease space to the Courts (Superior and Circuit), we lease space to the Department of Corrections for Probation and Parole and a small amount of space to the DMV for Driver Licensing. The State is involved in 38 court facilities throughout the State. They own 20 buildings and lease space in 18 others, including Grafton. The County has had discussions with the State, and they are unable to help financially with the capital costs of the building but will be continuing to lease space and this will allow the county to continue to generate annual revenue from these leases offsetting operational costs. We will also be able to maintain the efficiencies from the courts being located with the Sheriff's Department, County Attorney's Office and Department of Corrections.

How much is it going to cost and how will it be paid for?

The building has been planned through the Conceptual Design phase which has produced a Conceptual Design budget. This is an all-inclusive budget and includes demolition of the existing building. That estimated budget is \$47.3M. The County would finance the project through tax-exempt bonds. Different bond financing structures are available and being investigated. The financing structure that we are using for estimates would include two (2) separate bond issues done approximately a year apart. These would be for a total of \$47M. The bonds would be a 25-year issue at an average interest rate of 4.143%. There would be increases in the County portion of the tax bill for three years while the financing costs were added into the county's budget. Based on current information and using a home valued at \$400,000 this would on average amount to a \$59.24 increase in the county portion of a tax bill over three (3) years.

GRAFTON COUNTY PROPOSED COURTHOUSE PROJECT

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Grafton County will host a series of Public Informational Meetings regarding the Proposed Grafton County Courthouse Project. The following are the dates, times and locations for these meetings.

Date	Time	Location
Wednesday, October 1 st	7:00 PM	Historic Bristol Town Hall 45 Summer Street Bristol, NH 03222
Wednesday, October 8 th	7:00 PM	Plymouth Senior Center 8 Depot Street Plymouth, NH 03264
Wednesday, October 15 th	7:00 PM	Littleton Community Ctr 120 Main St Littleton, NH 03561
Tuesday, October 21 st	7:00 PM	Lebanon Senior Center 10 Campbell St. Lebanon, NH 03766

For More Information:

www.co.grafton.nh.us

Commissioner, Martha McLeod ~ mmcleod@graftoncountynh.gov

Commissioner, Wendy Piper ~ wpiper@graftoncountynh.gov

Commissioner, Katie Hedberg ~ khedberg@graftoncountynh.gov

County Administrator, Julie Libby ~ jlibby@graftoncountynh.gov

Maintenance Supt, Jim Oakes, joakes@graftoncountynh.gov

Grafton County Delegation (State Representatives)**2025/2026 Grafton County Delegation**District 1

Darrell Louis	Littleton	darrell.louis@gc.nh.gov	(603) 444-4801
Joseph Barton	Littleton	joseph.barton@gc.nh.gov	(603) 969-2706
Calvin Beaulier	Littleton	calvin.beaulier@gc.nh.gov	

District 2

Jared Sullivan	Bethlehem	jaredforthepeople@gmail.com	
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District 3

Jerry M. Stringham	Lincoln	jerry@jerrymstringham.com	(240) 601-4334
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District 4

Heather P. Baldwin	Thornton	hpbaldwin48@gmail.com	(603) 996-1037
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District 5

Marie Bjelobrk	Haverhill	marie.bjelobrk@gc.nh.gov	
Rick Ladd	Haverhill	rick.ladd@gc.nh.gov	(603) 443-1509

District 6

Linda Franz	Wentworth	linda.j.franz@gmail.com	(508) 341-9021
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District 7

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District 8

Bill Bolton	Plymouth	wbolton@live.com	(603) 236-1812
Sallie Fellows	Holderness	sallie.fellows@nh.gc.gov	(603) 536-3123
Peter Lovett	Holderness	peteralovett@gmail.com	(603) 759-5454

District 9

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District 10

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District 11

Lex Berezhny	Grafton	lex@berezhny.com	(603) 523-7608
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District 12

Mary A. Hakken-Phillips	Hanover	mhp4nhrep@gmail.com	
Russell Muirhead	Hanover	russmuirhead@gmail.com	(603) 727-6065
Terry Spahr	Hanover	tspahr1@gmail.com	(610) 420-1787
Ellen Rockmore	Hanover	ellen.rockmore@gc.nh.gov	(603) 643-0169

District 13

Laurel Stavis	Lebanon	lstavis100@gmail.com	(603) 359-4161
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District 14

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District 15

Thomas Cormen	Lebanon	thcorman@gmail.com	(603) 448-2442
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District 16

David Fracht	Enfield	david.fracht@gc.nh.gov	(603) 208-9800
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District 17

Susan W. Almy	Lebanon	susan.almy@comcast.net	(603) 448-4769
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District 18

Donald McFarlane	Orange	donald.mcfarlane@gc.nh.gov	(603) 523-7412
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Executive Committee Members