

# Construction to Begin Soon on Juvenile Courtrooms

By Dave Ricker

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By the end of April, Pima County facilities management officials should have a better idea about the start of construction for the build out of new courtrooms and other facilities at Pima County Juvenile Court.

The \$2 million approved by voters for the juvenile court project in May 2004, will fund the next phase of a \$42 million bond project approved by voters in May 1997. Using funds approved in 1997, Pima County built 210,000 square feet of juvenile court detention and administrative facilities on 11 acres of land adjacent to the then existing juvenile court center. The new juvenile court center increased detention capacity up to 300 beds and included 10 new courtrooms and shell space for an additional four courtrooms and associated judicial chambers.

State law was changed in 1997 to require much more judicial oversight of child abuse and neglect cases because these caseloads have increased significantly. There has also been a significant increase in the number of hearings on motions and petitions for termination of parental rights since 1997.

## Project funding

Pima County Facilities Management Project Manager Gary Campbell said \$1.2 million is earmarked for the

four courtrooms and judicial offices and the renovation of the old juvenile court facility for use as a training center. Mr. Campbell also said that \$800,000 has been set aside for improvement to the heating and air conditioning units at juvenile court. "The money is available and my understanding is that county government would like us to move as quickly as possible," said Comm. Elizabeth Peasely-Fimbres, a judicial representative to the planning committee charged with oversight of the juvenile court project. "Our goal is to complete the entire project by December or January."

Comm. Peasely-Fimbres said that Durant Architects, who designed the court building authorized by the 1997 bond election, were chosen for the current project. "We have had a final architectural overview of what's going to happen and the architects are working on the detailed plans so that it can go out for bid," she said.

## Project goals

The addition of four new courtrooms will expand the number of courtrooms from 10 to 14. "Three will be the size of our standard courtrooms and one will be a slightly larger courtroom for higher profile, more involved cases. It could also be used

See JUVENILE, p. 8

JUVENILE, Continued from p. 4

for other purposes when needed," Comm. Peasely-Fimbres said. "We are sharing courtrooms. I share a courtroom. Judge Liwski and Judge Quigley job share and they are borrowing courtrooms from other judges and Judge Chon-Lopez is holding court in a converted conference room."

There are no plans for using the largest of the new courtrooms for jury trials. "It will simply be a larger courtroom," Comm. Peasely-Fimbres said. "The logistics of having jury trials at juvenile court are very complicated."

Complications include transportation of jurors and meals for jurors since juvenile court has no jury assembly room facilities or jury commissioner. Thus, jury trials regarding the termination of parental rights will continue to be held at superior court downtown. "As of April, our judges will go downtown for one week at a time or as long as it takes to complete a particular trial," Comm. Peasely-Fimbres said.

And, the plans call for the construction of four new sets of judicial chambers for judges and their staffs. "They will be identical to current chambers," Comm. Peasely-Fimbres added.

The Human Resource Department for juvenile court will find a new, permanent home on the first floor of the court center. "Those staff members had to be moved out to a trailer be-

cause we ran out of space in this building," Comm. Peasely-Fimbres explained.

## Training facility

Additionally, the plans call for renovation of the old, original juvenile court building for use as a training center for the courts. "It's going to be available for training for both the downtown staff members as well as juvenile court staff members," said Comm. Peasely-Fimbres.

The training center is expected to provide the courts with flexibility in training space including both large and small rooms for classes. There will be a reception area used for registration for classes and possibly office space for the training staff.

Plans call for utilization of about 2,000 sq. ft. that will allow for 190 chairs and will provide space much larger than any conference room currently in use for training downtown. "This will be quite a large room that can be broken down into smaller rooms where we can accommodate a significant number of people. We anticipate being able to be very flexible and accommodate the training needs of the entire superior court," Comm. Peasely-Fimbres said.

*Dave Ricker is community relations coordinator for Pima County Superior Court. The article above is reprinted from the court's newsletter, Minute Entry.*