

Commissioners shudder at big building plan

By Tim Richard
staff writer

A plan to build a new Oakland County courthouse tower with 24 courtrooms raised hackles when a Board of Commissioners looked at it this week.

"A Taj Mahal... a wish list," said dismayed members of the planning and building committee studying a broad outline plan to spend \$40 million on three buildings.

"We started at \$21 million for a library, a courthouse and a computer center," said its chairwoman, Anne Hobart, R-Waterford. "It seems to me we've gone way beyond that."

HOBART'S COMMITTEE bounced back to County Executive Daniel T. Murphy's staff the plans for the courthouse wing and library, asking for a work plan and some possibly cheaper options.

"From what I'm hearing, I'm not going to get your endorsement on this," said Don Malinowski, the executive's facilities planning chief.

But the panel approved the document proposing a \$5 million computer center to go on the west side of Telegraph Road.

The panel discussed three books of "guides" to be used in negotiating with Yamasaki Associates, a Troy architectural firm selected for the project. Next steps will be to approve a contract with Yamasaki and then the architect's plans.

Biggest bone of contention was Murphy's proposal to build an entirely new courthouse wing in the county complex at 1200 N. Telegraph. It would house the 14 current circuit judges, four new circuit judges expected to be added by 1992, the four current probate judges and two new probate judges.

Commissioners had been thinking in terms only of incremental court space for new judges. They anticipate public resentment if present courtrooms are abandoned.

BUT MURPHY surprised them by proposing a new north wing to house

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— Daniel T. Murphy
county executive

all county courts plus an enlarged area for criminal defendants, record storage space and judges' chambers. Security is the chief reason.

"It is our opinion," Murphy said in a cover letter, "and also the opinion of the judges and their staff mem-

bers, that the present circuit and probate courtrooms don't provide adequate security for those persons who are involved in the court proceedings."

"Specifically, in the present courtrooms, there is intermingling and often undesirable contact among the judges, jurors, defendants, witnesses, prosecutors and attorneys."

"Further, the courtroom spectators and visitors are not now being properly checked and screened," said Murphy, adding the present courtrooms would be "very difficult and prohibitively expensive to alter."

He said remodeling "would require that they be out of service for an extended period of time."

Staff studies show that related activities — such as Friend of the Court — need better facilities closer to the courts, the executive said.

In a separate interview, Murphy said he and the judges see the need for three separate entrances — for judges, for prisoners and for the public.

"I don't want a judge killed. I don't want anybody killed," he said.

THE LIBRARY plan drew little reaction from commissioners.

Murphy proposed a new building that would consolidate:

- The current law library, which is cramped into 13,000 square feet in the present courthouse tower.
- The reference library, which occupies 4,600 square feet in the Executive Office Building.
- The library for the blind and physically handicapped, currently in 2,500 square feet in the basement of the Farmington Hills library.
- The genealogy library, currently in the historic Gov. Wisner residence in Pontiac.
- Records space.
- Tenant space for the Oakland Bar Association and the Wayne-Oakland Library Federation.

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