Pierce County is developing a proposal to convert the former Human Services Campus site into a new building for the county’s general government services. This project affects lots of people -- roughly 1,300 county employees who would work in the new building, as well as people who live and work in Tacoma’s Lincoln District. This newsletter is designed to help keep interested stakeholders updated on the project’s status.

It’s important to note that we are still in the early stages. As you’ll read below, most of the work is based on years of analyzing county facilities and their needs, and determining whether and how services could be improved by co-locating departments into one building.

Now, we have engaged the services of an expert development team to guide us in designing how the space would work. We are still a long way from determining what the building would look like or how it would be situated on the property if county leaders give final approval to proceed.

Pat McCarthy  
Pierce County Executive

Why does Pierce County need a new building?

There are two main reasons:

1. The Pierce County Annex, located off of 35th Street, faces more than $10 million in critical needs that would only maintain the status quo and do nothing to improve efficiency or effectiveness.

2. Pierce County leases nearly 150,000 square feet of commercial office space in eight buildings around Tacoma. This is expensive and will get more so over the years after factoring in regular rate increases, and the decentralization hampers the ability of county employees to collaborate effectively and to provide efficient services to the public.
Why does Pierce County need a new building? (cont.)

In 2012, County Executive Pat McCarthy commissioned a study to investigate the feasibility of improving service delivery and saving money by co-locating most general-government offices into one building.

A team of senior leaders from 12 county departments spent a year analyzing the issue and recommended a solution involving a public-private partnership on the site of the former Puget Sound Hospital campus.

The County Council authorized Executive McCarthy’s team to proceed to the next step: hiring an experienced and innovative development team to work with affected county departments to identify their workspace needs.

The project is on schedule to deliver a proposed lease-to-own contract to the County Executive and County Council by year’s end. If county leaders approve it, construction would begin next year. But there’s a lot of work to be done before then.

A Public-Private Partnership

This project is designed to use a special method of financing and construction delivery known by its IRS rule as the 63-20 method. Under this method, a nonprofit corporation called the National Development Council was selected to facilitate the project using tax-exempt bonds (which lowers the price) and own the building. The county would occupy it under a guaranteed lease and take ownership at the end of the term. This process combines the most cost-effective financing with the best private-sector construction practices and experiences.

Under 63-20, capital construction costs are typically 25-30% lower than traditional design/bid/build delivery models - Annex Report

What is 63-20

63-20 Financing is an alternative method of obtaining tax-exempt bonds to be used for the construction of public facilities.

Bonds are issued by a non-profit organization on behalf of the government agency. Non-profit corporation constructs the building and then leases it to the government agency. Lease payments pays off the bond debt, and when the lease term ends the facility is then transferred to the government agency at no additional cost.
Introducing the Development Team

Wright Runstad Associates LLC leads the development team selected by the county for the design and construction of the proposed new administration building. Joining the county team and Wright Runstad is NBBJ Architects, Gunsul + Iverson Architects, and Howard S. Wright.

The design team’s approach to the new building is to design it “from the inside out” - meaning, the focus is on creating workspaces that enable employees to operate most efficiently and effectively.

The two architectural firms work closely; with Gunsul + Iverson designing the interior spaces and NBBJ activating the interior design and work flow / business process needs through their focus upon the building core and shell (e.g., structure and exterior).

The general contractor, Howard S. Wright Construction interacts with the design team members to provide constructibility and cost input on the concepts as they are being developed by the architects. Ultimately of course, Howard S. Wright is in charge of the actual construction and site development. Wright Runstad keeps a focused eye on costs and value for the building throughout design and construction up through occupancy.

Development Process Timeline

2014
Design Concepts
Budget Development
Developer Establishes Guaranteed Maximum Price
Executive/County Council Approval*

1st Quarter 2015*
Public Outreach and Regulatory Input
Final Design
Permits Issued
Construction Begins

2nd Half 2016*
Building Ready for Occupancy

* If approved
Meet a Member of the Design Team

Leading the programming effort for the team is Karen Gunsul, from Gunsul + Iverson Architects. With over 35 years of interior architecture, Karen has established a professional reputation for providing the highest levels of planning and design. Karen’s collaborative approach and leadership skills have provided her the opportunity to work with some of the world’s top companies like Safeco, Bank of America & Microsoft.

In this land of Microsoft, Amazon, and computer programmers, you might be asking what this topic has to do with designing and building a new general government administrative building. Programming for the new building is the detailed, structured engagement undertaken by designers and space planners (wait, wait stay with us, we’re not talking NASA here) to learn about the future occupants and users of the building. Like the foundation of a building, programming in building design sets the understanding and layout of the workspaces, public areas and meeting spaces, lobbies and loading docks. It is the support to what will become the overall building itself.

In total, 37 meetings with individual departments and specific technical spaces will help define the needs.

Design Kick Off

What does success look like?

Twenty-five county department leaders were welcomed by Executive Pat McCarthy on June 24th at the offices of NBBJ in Seattle. The day-long event was led and facilitated by Jacob Simons, NBBJ Experience Design Director and included members of the development team.

The discussion began with identifying the ideal culture of Pierce County government. The group then discussed the county’s strategic objective to deliver essential, customer-focused government services with innovation and passion.

Taking this into consideration, the group focused on defining the objectives that would make this project a success.

Programming? I thought a building was being designed

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In the Next Issue

- A look at the Former Human Services campus.
- Building for the Future: The Masterplan.
- Meet the Developer: Wright Runstad.

For more information visit the Project Webpage featured on www.piercecountywa.org/facilities

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