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Arapahoe County celebrates grand opening of new centralized court security entrance connecting Courthouse I and II

Visitors no longer have to wait outside to pass through security at Justice Center

CENTENNIAL, COLO --- On Thursday, Arapahoe County celebrated the grand opening of the new centralized security entrance, which connects the lobbies of Courthouses I and II at the Arapahoe County Justice Center, 7325 S. Potomac St., Centennial.

The new entrance opens to the public Jan. 21 and significantly changes how visitors to the Arapahoe County Justice Center will pass through security to enter Courthouse I or Courthouse II. The new entrance now includes room inside to pass through three separate security screening stations.

Completion of the centralized entrance is part of a multi-phase Arapahoe County project that began in 2005 to meet the space needs of the courts without increasing taxes.

“What is remarkable about this project is how Arapahoe County found ways to meet the space needs for the courts without spending \$193 million, which was the original estimate to build a new Justice Center,” said Commissioner Nancy Doty, who serves as Board Chair. “By spending \$26.8 million, or \$166.2 million less than what was anticipated and making more efficient use of our facilities, we’ve been able to improve the Justice Center without burdening Arapahoe County residents with additional taxes.”

The latest phase, which began in May 2013, connects the lobbies of Courthouse I and II and expands the security screening areas at each courthouse. Arapahoe County also added a four-stop elevator and sally port on the east side of Courthouse II.

The \$5.4 million project adds interior space for security wait lines, which will better accommodate the multitude of jurors, visitors, attorneys and staff who visit the courts daily. Jurors, visitors, attorneys and staff will no longer have to wait outside – sometimes in inclement weather – to pass through security at either entrance.

“This is a great project in that it provides greater efficiency, improved security and an overall better experience to the customers and staff who visit the Arapahoe County Justice Center,” said Undersheriff

David Walcher, adding that the Sheriff's Office screens more than 45,000 visitors to the Justice Center each month.

Since 2005, Arapahoe County has been addressing ways to best meet the space needs of the courts by taking a phased-approach to improvements and without increasing taxes. Faced with the addition of new judges, a shortage of courtrooms and an overcrowded jail, the Board of County Commissioners in 2005 appointed the Judicial Facilities Review Committee – a 30-member group that spent two years researching the short and long-term needs for both the courts and jail.

The Committee wrapped up its work in 2007 and presented the Commissioners with three proposals, which included establishing a Justice Coordinating Committee, developing short and long-term space solutions to address court and jail needs, and finding creative solutions to manage court cases and the jail population.

At the time, the committee projected it would cost Arapahoe County more than \$500 million over 20 years to address its court and jail space needs, of which \$193 million was designated to build a new judicial center.

Since 2007, Arapahoe County has invested \$26.8 million to meet the space needs for the 18th Judicial District at the Arapahoe County Justice Center. Here is what Arapahoe County has accomplished:

- Built 16 new courtrooms
- Expanded one courtroom
- Built a new Jury Room and Court Clerk offices
- Purchased and renovated a 45,000-square-foot vacant building for the District Attorney's Office.
- Built the centralized entrance connecting the lobbies of Courthouse I and II
- Installed security screening equipment
- Added a four-stop elevator for Courthouse II
- Added a sally port for Courthouse II
- Expanded and reconstructed the visitor parking lot
- Improved the wetland water quality pond
- Added sidewalks to improve pedestrian access

"This new entrance to the Justice Center is a welcome addition and will improve access for everyone with business at the courthouse," said Chief Judge William B. Sylvester. "On behalf of the Court, as well as our community as a whole, I thank the Arapahoe County Board of County Commissioners and their staff for making this possible."

Arapahoe County is beginning work on building a small courtroom on the third floor of Courthouse II. The Probation Department, which currently occupies the space, is slated to relocate to the County's nearby Lima Plaza campus in 2014. Plans to reconstruct the employee parking lot is tentatively slated for 2015.

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Media Note: Photos from the Jan. 16 ceremony are available at the County's website:

<http://www.arapahoegov.com/gallery.aspx?AID=11>

To learn more about improvements to the Arapahoe County Justice Center, access the Court Improvements Fact Sheet on our website. <http://www.arapahoegov.com/DocumentCenter/View/1767>