

SB 836 of 2016: Authorizing an Architectural Program for California's Capitol

California's State Capitol Complex is comprised of two sections, the original (1860-1874) west wing, rebuilt for earthquake safety and brought up to modern fire safety codes (1975-1982) and the attached State Capitol Building Annex (1949-1952) which adjoins the historic wing on its east side.

Together, these two structures comprise California's "People's House," the home to the Executive and Legislative branches of government.

Completed in 1952, the State Capitol Building Annex is showing its age in many ways. The Department of General Services summarizes its condition simply as "many of its key systems are in the 65th year of their expected 50 year useful life."

Senate Bill 836 of 2016 contemplates that as a precondition to its implementation, the Legislature must necessarily deliberate upon and make choices among possible alternatives as to the specifics of such a remedial project. This need to decide among as yet unidentified alternative choices is evident in the language of the statute at Government Code Section 9112 (a) which provides "the Joint Rules Committee may pursue the construction of a state capitol building annex or the restoration, rehabilitation, renovation, or reconstruction of the State Capitol Building Annex described in Section 9105."

The importance of the Legislature's early consideration of what the available choices are to re-establish a functional "People's House" that will support California's Executive and Legislative branches of government for the next century is emphasized by SB 836's drafting in Government Code Section 9112 (b) (1) which provides:

"All work performed pursuant to this article shall be administered and supervised by the Department of General Services, subject to review by the State Public Works Board, pursuant to an agreement with the Joint Rules Committee."

This need to specify in writing what the Annex Architectural Program entails so as to advance the work envisioned by SB 836 makes it a matter of first importance for the Joint Rules Committee to begin a process which can identify what reasonable, feasible, and desirable choices are available to the Legislature for its consideration.

By law, this Architectural Program's goals include requirements to:

"incorporate elements complementary to the historic capitol, elements to make it efficient and sustainable, and historic elements from the existing capitol building annex"
and that

"any state capitol building annex be designed as a working capitol for the public to effectively engage with their elected representatives and their state government."

To initiate the SB 836 process, the Joint Rules Committee will secure the services of an experienced professional architectural firm to begin conducting site surveys, interviews of stakeholders, and launch the process of systematizing and bringing forward to the Legislature issues and options available to it as part of the Capitol Annex Project. By law, this planning process must include examination of feasible alternatives, including whether to pursue "*construction of a state capitol building annex*" or, in the alternative, "*the restoration, rehabilitation, renovation, or reconstruction of the State Capitol Building Annex described in Section 9105 of the Government Code,*" as SB 836 of 2016 frames the most basic choice that must be decided by the Legislature in the next 12 to 18 months.

Many states have done Capitol updates in recent decades to address deficiencies – whether due to age, failing systems, changing security and life safety needs, inadequate meeting spaces, corridors, ADA issues and support for technology. Consequently, examples abound of states – including Minnesota, Texas, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, and Wyoming – which have led the way in re-conceiving and updating their own People's Houses.

In such states, "People's House" innovations are many and varied. They range from improving the proximity of Committee Chairs to their committee work areas; enlarging corridors to improve access; moving equipment from hallways into dedicated offices; and improving the flow of both employee and visitor traffic, with carefully planned safety measures that keep the People's House safe and welcoming for those whose work brings them there, and for all visitors, including school children.

California's 65-year old Annex, which is home to the Governor and 115 of California's 120 lawmakers, and key legislative professional support offices, is among the state's most-visited public buildings. In 2016, it had almost 2 million visitors, including tens of thousands of grade school children. The Annex, however, has corridors which are undersized for this traffic volume, and lacks sprinklers and other safety features that are typical of modern construction. In many places, office equipment or other artifacts constrict movement through corridors.

As an aging building with failing systems built before modern fire safety practices took hold, and before the invention of computers, photocopiers, rechargeable cars, cellular technology, and other technological advances, it presents the Joint Rules Committee with the question of how to configure the best-adapted building we can imagine to support California's legislative deliberations.

One very unique and valuable attribute of the State Capitol Annex Building, as it exists today, is its "adjacency" to the historic wing of the Capitol building, which is its hallmark. Although compact, the proximity of the Annex to the west wing of the Capitol building allows lawmakers to timely fulfill their constitutional obligations.

A People's House should help its occupants perform their Constitutional duties. To this end, it makes sense to consider how the building and its internal arrangement can minimize the steps – and hence the time – members need to move between committees, whether for deliberating

or presenting bills, when heading to caucus or the floor, or when reaching out to colleagues to discuss the issues of the day. An efficient arrangement, which largely supports lawmakers in the aging Annex, is a positive of the original Annex design. It is a design attribute, aging though it is, that accords with Winston Churchill's great observation about architecture, that:

"We shape our buildings and thereafter they shape us."

To strengthen the Legislature's co-equal status by adopting "best practices," considerations can be made to whether key Standing Committees, if they have migrated offsite, can be returned to the Legislature's building so staff can be re-integrated in better proximity to their Chairs. A Chair that can easily and naturally engage in committee "management by walking around" is a stronger chair and will, during the allowed 12-year maximum term limit, more readily gain a commanding influence on subject matter, goal-setting, and productivity.

The aim of the Architectural Program for California's Capitol is straightforward.

It aims to utilize architectural design professionals to help envision an approach to the Capitol Annex Project which includes consideration of the following:

- Physical layout and circulation plans.
- Ease of access to needed professional services.
- Working spaces organized to enable more efficient use of time.
- Safe and secure access to support participation and involvement by all members of the public as befits our democratic traditions, increasing the productivity of each of the 120 lawmakers in the full scope of their responsibilities -- as individuals, as members of multiple committees, as Chairs or Vice Chairs seeking to put their particular mark on public policy they oversee, as caucus Members, and as when they act as a full body.

Once the evaluation and envisioning phase is completed, a process administered by the Joint Rules Committee is anticipated to take 12 to 18 months, at which time the Joint Rules Committee will enter into a written agreement with the Department of General Services to obtain their services in moving the building project forward toward actual design and pricing.

This web page is designed to provide public access to relevant background work, research, and fact-finding which have been ongoing in preparation for the more formal engagement of design professionals and other experts who will assist in this project's analysis, exploration of available options, eventual definition, and practical planning.