

Opposition mounts as Capitol Annex project moves forward

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The eastern side of the State Capitol building in Downtown Sacramento is slated for demolition and replacement with a new structure, but groups opposing the project believe there are cheaper, better ways of getting the same benefits.

With less than six months before its current occupants begin moving into a new state office building to the south, [replacing the Capitol Annex](#) is beginning to see more opposition.

A group opposed to tearing down the existing structure on the Capitol building's eastern half issued a letter this week calling on Gov. [Gavin Newsom](#) to cancel the project, citing changes that haven't been publicly vetted.

"This last iteration has so much that's new and different, our reaction is to be astounded," said [Dick Cowan](#), a member of the group Public Accountability for Our Capitol.

The existing annex, which dates to the 1950s, has issues with Americans with Disabilities Act compliance, seismic code compliance and an overall lack of space that make it increasingly obsolete, according to state officials. For more than a decade, state governors have agreed, with then-Gov. [Jerry Brown](#) authorizing a replacement of the annex in 2017.

At a new hearing on the project late last month, state officials and a project team including [Lionakis](#) and [Turner Construction](#) Co. revealed a final design of a "double-T" shaped building to be built in place of the existing annex.

Cowan said that design includes glass walls and a new interior space for events, features that take it far beyond the stated purpose of a more functional building to house the state legislative and executive branches.

"No wonder they wouldn't give us a project overview," Cowan said. His group, as well as others that have formed in the last year, have a number of other issues with the project as well, including the loss of trees in Capitol Park for a new parking garage to serve the project, the inclusion of the garage itself and the overall price tag of about \$1 billion.

But the chair of the legislative committee overseeing the project said opponents have inaccurately described the project. The number of trees being removed is far fewer than those claimed, said Assemblyman [Ken Cooley](#), D-Rancho Cordova. And the annex project would take out driveways that interrupt pedestrian use of the surrounding Capitol Park now, he said, making it a better place to visit.

"I feel like they're talking about issues that aren't appropriate to the project," he said.

A "swing space" office building at 10th and O streets in Downtown Sacramento, a couple blocks south of the Capitol, should be completed by Oct. 1, Cooley said. The current annex occupants could start moving then, clearing the way for the annex project itself to start.

Short of canceling the project, Cowan and other opponents believe an environmental impact report for the project should at least be recirculated to acknowledge the final design. A better, cheaper solution would be simply rehabbing and improving the existing annex, Cowan said, as the state has done with other office buildings and courthouses.

If the state doesn't listen to those suggestions, he added, his group is ready to legally contest the project.

"I can't imagine a public project being more secretive," Cowan said.