

The Sacramento Bee | By Hannah Wiley | November 18, 2021

Dozens of environmental and preservation activists on Wednesday protested the demolition of the California Capitol annex, a 69-year-old structure attached to the historic statehouse that lawmakers consider outdated and dangerous.

Close to 50 people congregated on the west steps of the Capitol in opposition to the [\\$1.2 billion plan to bulldoze the warren of offices and upgrade it by 2025](#), arguing that it is an unjustifiable expense that sacrifices the building's historical integrity and risks killing several important trees in the park. They carried signs reading, "Save Your Capitol Porch and Trees," and "No Demo."

Karen Jacques, a board member of Preservation Sacramento, said razing the annex would mean losing a "historic resource" critical to the capital city's character.

"I personally love this place," Jacques said. "I live downtown. The park is a place where I come regularly...it's a place where I've come for its beauty and respite for many years."

In 2018, the Legislature and then-Gov. Jerry Brown authorized the renovation. They chose a plan to demolish the annex and build a new one in part because the current building has narrow hallways, limited exits, barriers that restrict access to people with physical disabilities, leaks and a shortage of safety features like sprinklers.

The entire plan includes a Capitol visitor's center and underground parking garage, along with a new office building downtown to temporarily house members during annex reconstruction.

The annex was built in 1952 and currently houses legislators, the governor, lieutenant governor and state officials. In its project outline, the Department of General Services says the east wing has "[reached a critical deterioration point](#)."

Proponents for the improvements argue the building has fallen out of compliance with a list of building and safety codes, including Americans with Disabilities Act standards. They point to a variety of safety concerns, like asbestos and mold, and an outdated building design that makes it difficult to do the people's business.

Opponents say the Legislature has other options.

"Yes, it's a 70-year-old building. But the state knows how to rehabilitate old buildings," said Richard Cowan, a former chair of the Historic State Capitol Commission. "The Legislature, they've been a poor steward. And it's always been too inconvenient to do that upgrade. To me, it's a little wrong to say now, 'We should tear it down because of these needs, which we've ignored over the years.'"

Around a dozen people during the demonstration entered the Capitol to deliver flyers detailing their concerns to Assemblyman Ken Cooley, chair of the Assembly Rules Committee and the brains behind the new design. Cooley's door was locked, and he did not respond to The Sacramento Bee's requests for comment.

Many lawmakers have already packed up their offices and are prepping to move into the new government building, dubbed the "swing space," as soon as this week. The new annex is expected to be completed by 2025.

The project faces a legal challenge in Sacramento Superior Court, where opponents are seeking to [block the overhaul](#)