

**Capitol Weekly | By Uriel Espinoza-Pacheco | November 30, 2021**

Sacramento's core is being transformed by an array of construction and infrastructure improvements — much to the ire of detour-weary motorists.

But the centerpiece of the building has nothing to do with the city — it's the state Capitol's annex, which contains a hive of government offices.

The overhaul of the granite annex, a six-story appendage to the Capitol that opened in 1952, and the accompanying construction of a new office building a block away carry an estimated \$1.3 billion price tag — reflecting an increase over the amount originally projected.

Located in the newly built building at 10th and O, until the Capitol annex renovation's projected completion in three years. When those workers head back to the Capitol, the newer building also will serve to house state workers now toiling in older structures. The new building alone has a projected cost of \$423.6 million.

The annex has long been denounced by lawmakers and others as crowded, antiquated and dangerous, a fire trap in violation of rules to protect the disabled. For years, they have called for new construction.

While migration to the new "swing" office at 10th and O is already underway, opponents have still been trying to put a halt to the construction project.

The most vocal opponents are environmentalists, conservationists, and fiscal critics, who point to the potential damage to trees in Capitol Park and the high price tag.

They have sued the state — twice — to block the project. They have targeted the Department of General Services, which manages state contracts; the Joint Rules Committee, the two-house panel with jurisdiction over Capitol Buildings; and the Finance Department, the state agency that writes the governor's budgets. An initial suit was dismissed, the second remains active in the Sacramento County Superior Court.

"California lawmakers are bulldozing ahead with a costly plan to demolish the East Annex, block public access to the West Steps, and destroy Capitol Park," [the group contends](#).

Key lawmakers disagreed.

"The new space will improve accessibility for all Californians who visit the Capitol," noted an earlier statement released by the Joint Rules Committee.

"It will include wider corridors, removal of bottlenecks, spaces for informal conferencing outside of path-of-travel corridors, more welcoming spaces that are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), additional committee hearing rooms that hold more people, and modern technology to increase civic engagement in a secure and welcoming People's House," the statement added.

"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, [told the Sacramento Bee](#). "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.'"

California's Capitol has been gone through its share of wear and tear.

Construction first commenced here in 1860, six years after Sacramento was named California's permanent capitol, and since then a lot has changed. The Capitol housed the Legislature, the executive branch, and other officials, such as the Treasurer and Secretary of State.

But nine decades later, the growth of government outstripped the building. The annex was built to provide space, and it did: Before the expansion, Assembly and Senate members had to carry out business on the floor of their respective chambers, or any other place they could find.

But in recent years, the popularity of the annex has declined. In 2018, then Gov. Jerry Brown approved the annex project.

The annex functions with an aging mechanical system that was largely built from materials commonly used in the 1950's. Over the years its problems have piled up. The failing plumbing system has led to leaks that have caused damage at the point of the leak and to the floors below.

Hazardous materials like lead, mold and even asbestos have to be addressed as well as its lack of accessibility under the federal Americans with Disabilities Act. Because of this, and more, legislators in 2018 approved demolishing and rebuilding the annex.

To adequately provide for the housing of the Legislature and the Executive Branch during the construction of a new capitol annex, in July 2018 the Department of General Services was authorized to pursue the design and construction of a "swing" state office building located on O Street, between 10th Street and 11th Street.

The building will have approximately 472,600 gross square feet and be subject to the Capitol View Protection Act height limit of 150 feet.

The building will include 10 floors of office space, and will incorporate functional space for committee hearings, caucus meetings, general meeting rooms, and legislative and Executive Branch offices, with integrated parking.

At the Capitol, current plans include relocating the underground parking structure and adding a visitor's center. Based on the space requirements, the preliminary estimate for the annex replacement is about \$507 million, \$6.4 million for the relocated parking structure and about \$30 million for the visitor center.

The O Street building will temporarily house approximately 1,250 legislative and executive elected officials and staff from the Capitol Annex until the new Annex project is completed. The building will then be jointly used as office space for approximately 2,200 legislative and executive employees.

On Nov. 17, Save Our Capitol supporters gathered on the west steps of the Capitol to protest the construction.

"Initially only 20 or 30 trees would be removed — that is concerning," project opponent Anne Fenkner told people at the rally, "but now we are learning that 60 trees will be permanently removed. Additionally, 74 trees will be transplanted including 49 historic palms on N and L (streets)."

[From Earl Warren to Gavin Newsom, governors worked this building. Its demolition nears](#)

**The Sacramento Bee | By Hannah Wiley | December 2, 2021**

Closing time, one last call for the annex.

California lawmakers this week packed up decades of political history as they moved their Capitol annex offices to the chic new government building across the street where they'll work for the next four years.

Their relocation kick starts a [\\$1.2 billion plan](#) to demolish the 69-year-old east wing of the Capitol — built when Earl Warren was governor — and replace it with [a modernized statehouse, visitor's center and parking garage](#).

Gov. Jerry Brown authorized the renovation in 2018 as part of a [broader effort to revamp downtown Sacramento's state government corridors](#).

The Legislature chose a plan to bulldoze the annex, arguing that asbestos, mold and inadequate safety features like missing sprinklers and limited exits, justify the upgrade.

Assemblyman Ken Cooley, D-Rancho Cordova, who's engineered much of the plan, said the project will restore "hospitality of the building for all Californians."

"This is a baseline value of the California state Capitol to welcome the public to the people's house," he said during a Wednesday press tour of the annex and new government building, dubbed the "swing space."

The departure marks a bittersweet and historic moment for those who've spent years working in California politics.

"Moving out of the building, I think there is sort of a romanticism that comes into play," said Severiano Christian, who has worked as an intern, fellow and legislative aide before their current role as legislative director for Sen. Scott Wiener, D-San Francisco.

"It sounds so cheesy. But for me at least, I recognize the office that I was in ... that used to be Mark Leno's office, the state Senator from San Francisco," Christian said. "Think about all of the sort of negotiations and power plays that came to be literally within our office and in the annex in its entirety. We all have our own feelings about politics and stuff, but at the end of the day, that building, there are so many memories associated with it."

#### **WORKING THE HALLS FOR GOV. SCHWARZENEGGER**

Nanette Farag, who served as senior legislative assistant to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, is similarly feeling nostalgic.

Farag began working in the building nearly 20 years ago, started her career as an intern and worked her way through the executive suite to chief of staff for former Assemblywoman Catharine Baker. She's now vice president of political affairs at Randle Communications.

Farag reminisced about the many times she got lost on mismatched floor levels between the annex and rotunda and, in 2004, when the [governor's office flooded](#) during the final week of bill signings.

"Decades of memories and history," Farag said. "Lots of wins, lots of losses. Lifelong friendships that have started there and will continue on and a lot of great memories. It's always going to be the Capitol. It will always be special. But it's like coming into a new era seeing change like this."

Nghia Nguyen, who's been working in the Legislature since 2002 and now serves as chief of staff to Assemblyman Vince Fong, R-Bakersfield, remembers the age of budget impasses, when members and staff couldn't leave the building without a deal.

Nguyen said she's taking her two children, now 17 and 15, to see the building in the next few days so they have a chance to say goodbye. Years ago she used to set up their playpens next to her desk when she was a single working mom,

Though she has "fond" memories of the building, Nguyen said the upgrade is "badly needed."

"The Capitol is supposed to be the people's house. But right now, not all people have access to it," she said. "I've been in offices where it's so narrow, that someone with a wheelchair can't go to the back like someone else can. And you can't single someone out like that."

### **PRESERVATIONISTS CHALLENGE DEMOLITION PLAN**

Construction on the new annex was supposed to begin during the first quarter of 2022, Cooley said. But a handful of lawsuits have already been filed to block the project, including one in Sacramento Superior Court seeking [to resolve discrepancies in the environmental review process](#).

In November, dozens of activists fighting the demolition showed up to the Capitol to urge the Legislature to consider renovation as an alternative to destruction.

Paula Peper, an urban forestry expert who resigned from the Historic State Capitol Commission due to lack of transparency over the project, said she doesn't disagree the place needs a makeover.

"There's no question that the annex needs renovation, rehabilitation," Peper said. "I understand everybody is thrilled to go to a spanking new building. But there is a history that will be lost. My personal thought is move to the swing space, enjoy it. And renovate the existing annex."

Cooley said he's "hopeful the litigation will get sorted out by the spring," and that the Legislature is in "good shape" to withstand the legal challenges. The new annex is still scheduled for completion by the end of 2025.

When the Legislature reconvenes Jan. 3 for the 2022 session, more than 1,000 people will have moved over to the swing space, [a swanky building with plenty of windows and natural light](#). Along with legislative suites, the new building will also house the governor, lieutenant governor and hearing rooms. Gov. Gavin Newsom has already moved his office out of the annex and has been working from the swing space since Nov. 22.