

# FAQs for the Hancock Judicial Center Proposal

## 1) Summary of the proposal:

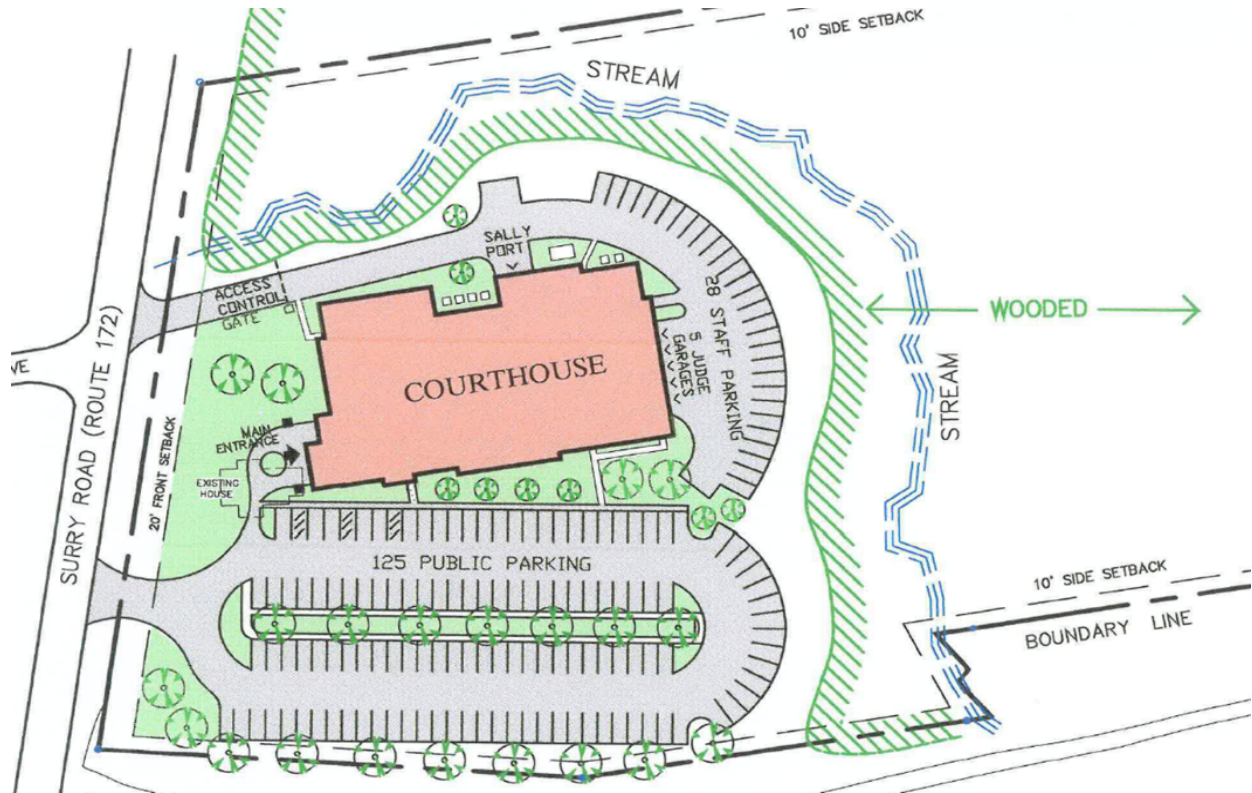
The Judicial Branch proposes to build a new Hancock Judicial Center (HJC) at 120 Surry Road in Ellsworth, consisting of 4 courtrooms (2 jury and 2 non-jury) with a consolidated clerk's office, at least 8 conference rooms, and 125 public parking spaces. The building will be 2 1/2 stories, with a footprint of about 25,000 square feet. The proposal was developed in consultation with professional architects and engineers to confirm that the property was suitable.

### Site Location & Description:

- 120 Surry Road (Rte. 172), Ellsworth
- 0.9 miles from existing courthouse and city center
- 17.9 acres
- 350' road frontage
- mostly undeveloped with sloping views to the Union River
- 3-phase electric
- city water/sewer
- surveyed
- environmental inventory (wetlands, vernal pool check) completed
- sidewalk to within 500 yards (City open to extending)
- stormwater mitigation feasible onsite
- commercial and residential abutters (café, auto repair business, offices, and single and multi-family dwellings, including a vacant single-family home on the site)



Project sketch:



**2) What is the projected cost of the project and how will it be funded?**

The project is estimated to cost \$55M and will be funded by securities (bonds) issued by the Maine Governmental Facilities Authority.

**3) Why is a new courthouse needed for Hancock County?**

The current Hancock County Courthouse was built in 1931 and has numerous safety, space, electrical, parking, and mechanical deficiencies that have negatively affected court operations and public service for many years.

The Judicial Branch first considered options to renovate the present courthouse or add a standalone addition next door. Both options proved infeasible. Considerable portions of adjoining property are not buildable because of wetlands and rock ledge. The current and adjoining properties lack sufficient parking. Renovation of the present courthouse would interfere with the historic preservation of a local landmark.

**4) How was the 120 Surry Road site selected?**

The Judicial Branch has been pursuing suitable properties in Ellsworth on which to construct a new courthouse facility to serve the residents of Hancock County since 2019.

Meetings with County and City officials, discussions with area real estate professionals, and advertising in the Ellsworth American identified over 20 properties that met the minimum requirements for 5 acres of buildable area and public infrastructure access. Additional criteria such as proximity to the Ellsworth city center, road frontage, zoning, cost, topography, and environmental considerations narrowed the options significantly.

Environmental wetlands concerns and rock ledge prevented the development of the property adjacent to the current courthouse- Another property on the Bucksport Road that looked promising initially had wetlands restrictions that made the property incompatible with our proposed use.

**5) Has the proposal been presented to the Ellsworth Planning Board for approval?**

Not at this time. The Judicial Branch will follow the applicable City and State permitting and approval processes for the project when our design plan is complete.

**6) Will the proposal comply with zoning restrictions for a Neighborhood Zone per the City of Ellsworth's Ordinances and Codes?**

The Judicial Branch intends to have its design comply with all zoning restrictions.

**7) Has a traffic study been done for the location?**

A traffic study has not yet been done, but one is planned as part of the design plan.

**8) How will the proposal affect pedestrian traffic, stormwater runoff, and the character of the neighborhood?**

The Judicial Branch has had discussions with City officials regarding extending sidewalks to the property to improve pedestrian traffic. Development of the project will include facilities to treat stormwater onsite and mitigate stormwater runoff to pre-development levels. We intend to develop property west of the existing stream only. Land near the Union River will not be developed.

**9) How can I stay informed about the progress of the project?**

Check for updates on the HJC project on the Judicial Branch website at:  
<https://www.courts.maine.gov/about/projects/index.html>