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Kittitas County Courthouse security: looking to the future

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KITTITAS COUNTY — Kittitas County government officials said the next major step in courthouse security would be to create a single point of entry for those accessing law and justice offices and courtrooms.

Yet to do that means major remodeling, an addition or a new building that contains all law and justice-related functions — like a law and justice center.

A single point of entry would have security guards and metal detector scans for all going into the area that would contain superior and district court courtrooms and offices, and the Prosecutor's, Clerk's and juvenile probation offices.

Superior Court Judge Michael Cooper said a second, full-size superior courtroom will be needed in the near future, requiring major construction.

"These are all long-term dreams," Cooper said. "Right now, we have probably done about as much as we can do to improve security without major reconfiguring of the building and construction."

County voters twice in past years have voted down multi-million dollar construction bond requests for jail expansion and courthouse remodeling, upgrade and space improvements.

County commissioners are presently working on plans to make repairs to the overcrowded county jail and are seeking ways and funding to add jail space with a structure in the courthouse courtyard without raising taxes for the project.

Approval to call for bids for the repair work, estimated at \$1 million to \$1.5 million, may come by Nov. 1.

County Commissioner Alan Crankovich said adding a single point of entry to the courthouse with its current office configuration and structural layout "would be problematic."

Crankovich said it's not clear more security would be gained for the expense given the number of windows and doors at the courthouse.

He said the addition of the three courthouse security officers and the TV security cameras have vastly improved security.

He said the officers also respond to situations at the county permit center on North Ruby Street, the Morris Sorensen Building on Nanum Street and the Events Center at the fairgrounds.

Commissioner Mark McClain said the security officers and their station in the foyer of the courthouse also act as an information center for citizens needing directions to county offices.

"I believe they also have made our employees feel more secure and safe in a very busy courthouse," McClain said.