

Yakima County courthouse improvements get nod from state supreme court chief justice

[DONALD W. MEYERS Yakima Herald-Republic](#)

Jul 1, 2025

Yakima County's courthouse improvements should be an example for others, the state's highest-ranking judge said.

Washington Supreme Court Chief Justice Debra Stephens toured the courthouse and saw two renovated courtrooms in the North Second Street building Friday. Court Administrator Jessica Humphreys and Yakima County Superior Court Judge Kevin Naught served as Stephens' guides.

"I am so impressed with what they have done here," Stephens said, "It can be a real model for the state."

The two renovated courtrooms, one of which was scheduled to return to service on Monday, are part of a project funded with \$1.9 million from the American Rescue Plan Act.

Funds from the state Administrative Office of the Courts were used to upgrade the technology in the trial courtrooms.

The renovations are part of an effort to make the court more accessible as well as address wear and tear from decades of trials and court hearings.

The current courthouse was built in two stages. The North Second Street portion of the building, which serves as the main entrance, was built in 1941 as an addition to the 1906 courthouse that stood there.

The 1906 courthouse was demolished in the 1960s and replaced with the structure that faces North First Street. It was designed by architect John Maloney, who also designed St. Paul Cathedral and the A.E. Larson Building.

That wing was modified in 2011 to improve insulation and have a copper-colored exterior added.

One of the things that impressed Stephens was the system for displaying evidence and other documents during court hearings.

In the past, photos and other exhibits were placed under a camera, with the image projected on to a screen in a darkened courtroom. And an attorney once placed a lapel mic next to a speaker to amplify a recording that was hard to hear, Naught said.

Now, in the four trial courtrooms in the courthouse, images and video can be shared through computer monitors on the attorney's tables, the judge's bench and the witness box, as well as three monitors above the jury box and a large flat screen viewable from the courtroom gallery.

The courtrooms are also equipped with cameras for streamed proceedings.

Naught said there is an electronic pointer that a witness or an attorney can use to point to something on the screen, replacing the laser pointers that were used before.

The system feeds audio into speakers around the courtroom, as well as into assistive hearing devices.

"I have not seen anything this well done," Stephens said.

The plan also calls for ensuring that one courtroom in each wing of the building — which are separated by a small staircase that has a wheelchair lift — are fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The improvements include widening walkways in the rooms and making the jury boxes and clerks' desks accessible.

Later phases include upgrading two of the trial courtrooms in the North First Street section, as well as removing jury boxes in the two smallest courtrooms in Superior Court, replacing the two small customer service windows for the court's administrative office with a larger single window, and creating a secure room for attorneys to consult with their clients.

A new private restroom is planned. Currently in-custody defendants appearing in court have to be taken to a public restroom in handcuffs by a corrections officer, which Naught told Stephens is a security issue.

Reach Donald W. Meyers at dmeyers@yakimaherald.com.