

TO: Members of the House Committee on Corrections and Institutions

RE Essex County Courthouse Connector Project

From: Ed Clark, Vice Chair of the Guildhall Planning Board

It was with great interest that I watched the testimony of Gregg Mosley, Chief of Finance and Administration for the Vermont Judiciary before your committee on January 28, 2026 seeking the authorization of an additional \$500,000 for the project. Mosley stated that one of the reasons for the project was to build the necessary jury ports and so that detainees do not have to wait in the back of cruisers. His testimony continues the false narrative being used to justify this project. It is in fact rare that detainees have to wait in cruisers, if it ever has happened. The Sheriff's office already contains a holding cell and law enforcement officers guard detainees in conference rooms at the courthouse during jury trials and other hearings.

In April of last year Joyce McKeeman, the leader of the Vermont Association of Judges, testified before the House Corrections and Institutions Committee that "For decades, the two assistant judges in Essex County were very, very conservative fiscal stewards and did not want to raise the money that they could have raised to keep that building in good repair". She stated that the new assistant judges are "trying to make up for decades of neglect, really". (reported in vtdigger on April 9, 2025). Very similar claims were made by the assistant judges themselves in a letter to Essex County Town Committees on 2-15-2025. They state, in part, "In consultation with Vermont Judiciary leadership in Montpelier it was agreed that it was time to begin the process of upgrading the Court facilities that have not been upgraded in decades". None of this is true. One of many examples of upgrades was the construction of a new roof on the courthouse in 2007. The entire building was re-painted the following year and new security and recording devices have been added in recent years. There has never been a serious security issue at the court.

Other than full time staff, the one person who spends the most time in the courthouse is Laura Wilson, the contracted Essex County public defender. She has questioned the renovation's utility (vtdigger 6-9-2025) and in a letter to Judge Zonay (2-23-25) stated that "the scope of this project is not warranted. The court building is fundamentally sound and functional".

At a time when fewer federal dollars are flowing into Vermont, we are facing double digit tax increases, and many of our citizens can't heat their homes, pay for their health care, or even get enough to eat, it would be irresponsible and unconscionable for your committee to authorize even more money to support and fund this needless boondoggle project. You should be looking for ways to claw back the money already authorized.