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Delaware Family Court holds groundbreaking ceremony for new Kent County Family Court Courthouse in Dover

A groundbreaking ceremony was held Thursday, September 22, 2022, in Dover on the site of what will be the new Kent County Family Court building at the corner of S. Governors Avenue and Water Street, one block west of the Kent County Courthouse.

Delaware Family Court Chief Judge Michael K. Newell said it was exciting to be at the ceremony in Dover just about three months after the groundbreaking of the court's new Sussex County courthouse. "This is an historic day for the City of Dover, Kent County and the State of Delaware and it is another historic day for the Judicial Branch and especially the Family Court of the State of Delaware," said Chief Judge Newell.

The new Kent County Family Court Courthouse is similar to the new Sussex County facility in many ways as both used the same basic layout and plans for efficiency in design and construction. Both buildings have the same number of courtrooms and similar safety features, though the exterior of each is different, tailored to each community.

"The new Kent County Family Court courthouse and its sister Georgetown Family Court building are critical investments in the Delaware Judicial Branch. These facilities will make court proceedings safer and more efficient. We thank the Governor and the General Assembly for their support for modern and dignified courthouses to benefit all Delawareans," said Delaware Supreme Court Chief Justice Collins J. Seitz, Jr.

"State workers in each branch of government work hard every day, and they deserve to work in facilities where they can do their jobs well," said Governor John Carney. "The Family Court does incredibly difficult, but important work for our state. That's why we've made it a priority to include in our budget funding for a secure and modern Kent County Family Courthouse. Thank you to Chief Judge Newell for leading this effort, and to everyone involved in this project that will better serve Delaware families."

The new \$117.7 million 3-story 106,711 square-foot Kent County Family Court will replace an outdated 35,000 square-foot building at 400 Court Street in Dover that was built in 1989. Studies dating back more than a decade show the existing Family Court facility in Dover – like its soon to be retired Sussex County counterpart -- is unsafe by modern court standards and causes issues for attorneys, litigants, and court staff. Among other problems, the waiting areas and courtrooms in the current courthouse do not allow for adequate and appropriate distance between participants or appropriate privacy for discussions with counsel. In addition, court staff and judicial officers have to share elevators and hallways with detainees, rather than each having their own secure areas, as exist in other modern court facilities in the state like the Kent County Courthouse. The new building addresses these deficiencies in the holding area and in the secure transfer area for detainees.

The new facility will have more courtrooms – eight as opposed to the current six – and those courtrooms will be more than twice the size of the existing courtrooms (1,400 to 1,800 square feet in the new building versus an average of 600 square feet in the existing courthouse). These additional courtrooms will allow Family Court to better handle the volume of cases in Kent County, which has nearly doubled since the existing Family Court Courthouse opened in 1989. The new building will also have a 378-car parking garage.

The new Kent County Family Court facility is different than the new Sussex County Family Court facility, that is currently under construction, in that it is slightly smaller – by 1,089 square feet – because additional office space for partner agencies was not needed in Dover as many of those groups already had adequate office space nearby. In addition, the exterior appearance of the buildings is slightly different in that each facility was designed with consideration of the unique historic surroundings of each community. The Kent County Family Court facility has a number of architectural details that reference the surrounding historic district.

The Delaware Judiciary made it a priority to keep the courthouse in downtown Dover as part of its ongoing commitment to keep city and town centers in Delaware thriving. Furthermore, the new courthouse will be located on what had been a DNREC and EPA brownfield site and had difficulty attracting development or reuse.

In addition to Chief Judge Newell, Governor Carney and Chief Justice Seitz, other speakers at Thursday's groundbreaking included Family Court Judge Mardi F. Pyott and State Rep. Sean Lynn. Dover Mayor Robin R. Christiansen also attended the ceremony.

The ceremony concluded with a presentation by building architect William J. Lenihan of Tevebaugh Architecture and Bud Grove, a senior vice president of Wohlsen Construction, that will carry out the construction.

The construction is expected to begin this winter and be completed in late 2025.

[See renderings of the Kent County Courthouse](#)