

The Augusta Chronicle

Construction moving ahead on judicial center

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A year to the day after ground was broken for Augusta's new judicial center, construction is moving ahead on time and on budget, officials say.

The \$67 million building on a lot north of Walton Way between 10th Street and James Brown Boulevard is on target to open in the first few months of 2011, said Rick Acree, Richmond County assistant director of public services.

"Things are moving along," he said. "They are doing an excellent job."

Mr. Acree said the structure of the building -- to be called the Augusta Judicial Center and John H. Ruffin Jr. Courthouse -- is complete and workers are now installing electrical components and finishing the outer and inner walls. He said the roof is more than 90 percent complete.

There is a possibility employees could move into the building this time next year and that the project could come in under budget, said Chief Superior Court Judge Carlisle Overstreet.

Any leftover money likely would be funneled into another county building project, he said.

"Getting inside is probably going to slow down stuff a bit -- it's much more intricate work inside," Judge Overstreet said.

Once completed, the 180,000-square-foot building will house 15 courtrooms and hearing rooms and space for the district attorney's and solicitor's offices. Sections of the center will be two stories high and others will be four stories.

The increase in space will mean judges can schedule their time better and the justice system should take its course more swiftly, Judge Overstreet said.

"I think it adds a lot of prestige to the community," he said.

In terms of moving logistics, the biggest challenge will probably be shifting information technology services and the Clerk of Court records, he added.

A committee was first formed to plan a new courthouse in 1994. Richmond County voters approved money for it through several special-purpose sales tax ballots, but various locations were discussed before the final location was chosen.

The Augusta Commission voted in October to officially name the complex to honor Judge Ruffin, a retired state Court of Appeals judge who was the circuit's first black Superior Court judge.

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AUGUSTA JUDICIAL CENTER FACTS

LOCATION: Lot between 10th Street and James Brown Boulevard north of Walton Way

SIZE: 180,000 square feet

BUDGET: \$67 million

ESTIMATED COMPLETION DATE: First quarter of 2011

FEATURES: 15 courtrooms/hearing rooms and space for district attorney's and solicitor's offices.

Links:

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