



Broward County Courthouse Task Force Recommendations, Part 2

In my last newsletter, "[Broward County Courthouse Task Force Recommendations, Part 1](#)," I discussed the continuing problems plaguing our Broward County courthouse in downtown Fort Lauderdale. As a result of bursting pipes, increasing mold, broken elevators, security issues, and a chronic shortage of courtrooms and parking, our local judicial system is in turmoil. In fact, the County has recently been sued by several court employees alleging that the courthouse is dangerous and unfit for occupancy. Each of your nine County Commissioners has previously expressed a view that this problem needs to be addressed now. Unfortunately, we don't agree on how to pay for the new courthouse. In this month's newsletter, I would like to address this issue and tell you my view.

Last December the Broward County Commission established a Broward County Courthouse Task Force ("Task Force"). After studying many possible alternatives, in the end the Task Force recommended that a new scaled-down courthouse should be constructed on the site of the current judicial garage. By building on County-owned land, the overall cost of the project would decrease. In the past (and before I was elected), the County Commission had suggested building a new courthouse at a cost of approximately \$510 million; the Task Force's new scaled-down courthouse would cost approximately \$328 million. Similarly, previous County Commissions envisioned a new courthouse comprising nearly

900,000 square feet; the Task Force's new scaled-down courthouse would comprise approximately 675,000 square feet. The Task Force also recommended additional parking to meet existing and future courthouse needs.

There are two options being debated on how to pay for the new Courthouse.

The first option, which I don't support, is to allow the residents of Broward County to vote in 2010 on whether we should issue General Obligation Bonds (GOB) to pay for the courthouse. Although the intricate financial details of this proposal are beyond the scope of this article, suffice it to say that, if adopted, the tax burden on property owners would increase. As I wrote earlier this year in my newsletter, "[Broward County's Courthouse Problem: More Taxes Aren't The Solution](#)", I will never support a proposal that has the effect of raising the property tax burden on you and your families. So it should come as no surprise that I strenuously object to this proposal.

The second option, which I do support, is to pay for the new Courthouse from existing revenue and Certificates of Participation Bonds (COP). Broward County has set aside \$120 million for a new jail and future courthouse capital projects. We should use that money now. Moreover, during the last session, the Florida Legislature increased the Courthouse Facilities Fee from the existing \$15 to \$30. This potential revenue (as



much as \$4 million annually) can be utilized as well. Lastly, the County can issue COP bonds. The debt service on these bonds would be satisfied from payments no longer needed on expiring, previously issued bonds! The end result: a new Courthouse and **no increased tax burden** on the residents of Broward County.

In closing, I would like to add one final thought. When I campaigned for the honor of being your County Commissioner, I promised that I would address the needs of Broward County that had been ignored for so long by past Broward County Commissions. And I promised you that I would do so without increasing your property tax burden. This solution to our Courthouse problem fulfills both those promises.

My best to you and your families.