



**KING COUNTY**

1200 King County Courthouse  
516 Third Avenue  
Seattle, WA 98104

**Signature Report**

**July 6, 2000**

**Ordinance 13889**

**Proposed No. 2000-0396.3**

**Sponsors Nickels**

1 AN ORDINANCE relating to capital improvement  
2 program planning by the King County medical examiner's  
3 office.

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**STATEMENT OF FACTS:**

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1. As required by chapter 68.50 RCW relating to human remains, the  
8 medical examiner's office is responsible for investigation of all sudden  
9 and unexpected, suspicious and violent deaths that occur in the county. In  
10 addition, the medical examiner's office has adopted a mission: to serve  
11 the living by investigating, documenting and analyzing deaths that have  
12 medical, legal, criminal justice, injury prevention and violence reduction  
13 implications.

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2. To fulfill its mandate and mission, the facilities of the medical  
15 examiner's office should be safe, allow for operations that reflect current  
16 technology and are efficient and provide for secure holding of evidence  
17 and other items related to its legal and public health responsibilities.

## Ordinance 13889

18           3. The medical examiner's office is located in the facilities of the  
19 Harborview Medical Center (HMC). HMC has prepared and submitted to  
20 the county an amended long-range capital improvement project (CIP) plan  
21 that proposes to demolish the current space occupied by the medical  
22 examiner's office and construct space in a new multiuse building.

23           4. As part of the Public Health—Seattle and King County Operational  
24 Master Plan, dated August 16, 1999, and in association with HMC's CIP  
25 plan, the medical examiner's office has prepared materials addressing the  
26 elements of an operational master plan (OMP). The office has also  
27 prepared materials addressing elements of a capital improvement plan,  
28 updating its draft 1996 facility master plan. K.C.C. 4.04.200 requires such  
29 documents to serve as the basis for proposed capital improvement  
30 projects.

31           5. The council has examined the medical examiner's program and facility  
32 needs, as expressed in the elements of the OMP and the facility master  
33 plan and as further described by the medical examiner's office in response  
34 to council inquiry, and finds the materials adequate to serve as the basis  
35 for capital projects to meet the medical examiner's office facility needs for  
36 2001 through 2010.

37           BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF KING COUNTY:

38           SECTION 1. For the purpose of including the new facilities for the medical  
39 examiner's office in the ballot measure that seeks voter approval of bonds for financing  
40 of capital improvement projects at Harborview Medical Center's facilities, the elements

Ordinance 13889

41 of the operational master plan and facility master plan for the medical examiner's office,  
42 as found in Attachment A to this ordinance, are approved.

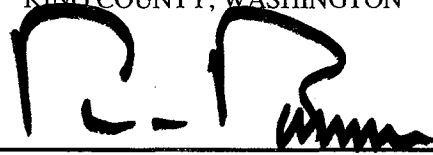
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Ordinance 13889 was introduced on 6/26/00 and passed as amended by the Metropolitan King County Council on 7/5/00, by the following vote:

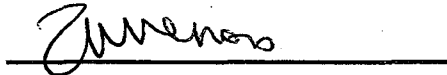
Yes: 12 - Mr. von Reichbauer, Ms. Miller, Mr. Phillips, Mr. Pelz, Mr. McKenna, Ms. Sullivan, Mr. Nickels, Mr. Pullen, Mr. Gossett, Ms. Hague, Mr. Vance and Mr. Irons  
No: 0  
Excused: 1 - Ms. Fimia

KING COUNTY COUNCIL  
KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON

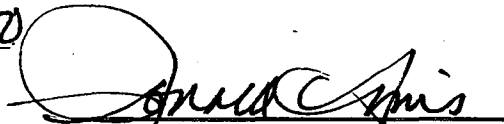


Pete von Reichbauer, Chair

ATTEST:



Anne Noris, Clerk of the Council

APPROVED this 12 day of July, 2000 

Ron Sims, County Executive

**Attachments**

A Medical Examiner's Office Capital Improvement Program Planning: Elements of an Operational Master Plan and Capital Improvement Plan as amended by Council 7-5-00

Medical Examiner's Office Capital Improvement Program Planning: Elements of an  
Operational Master Plan and Capital Improvement Plan

Responsibilities of the Medical Examiner. As directed by RCW 68.50, the Medical Examiner's (ME) Office, a program within the Prevention Division of the Public Health – Seattle & King County, is responsible for investigation of all sudden and unexpected, suspicious, and violent deaths that occur in the County. The ME's adopted mission is: *To serve the living by investigating, documenting, and analyzing deaths which have medical, legal, criminal justice, injury prevention, and violence reduction implications.*

Responsibilities of the Office include:

- Responding to death scenes and conducting investigation regarding the circumstances of death
- Transporting human remains from location of death to the Medical Examiner facility
- Determining the identification of the deceased
- Identifying, locating and notifying the decedent's next-of-kin of the person's death
- Control and disposition of evidence and the decedent's personal property
- Performing post mortem examinations, including forensic autopsies
- Certifying the cause of death
- Certifying the manner of death
- Completing accurate and timely reports such as autopsy reports and death certificates
- Cooperating with criminal justice agencies, medical providers, Labor and Industries, and other parties concerned with the investigation outcomes

The ME functions 24 hours a day/ 365 days a year and responds to death scenes throughout King County.

ME workload. Over the next ten years, the county's population is projected to increase by about 10 % (to a total of 1.9 million, as estimated by the Puget Sound Regional Council). Deaths are about 0.8% of the county population. Over the last 10 years, about 12% of the deaths have become ME cases and about 70% of the cases have required autopsies. Applying these figures, the ME would have about 1800 cases by 2010, up from 1500 in 1999, and conduct about 1300 autopsies, up from 1050. The increase in workload could result in increased staffing and, therefore, the need for additional workspace.

Program modifications. The ME's Office must remain current with advancements in the technology of forensic sciences. Many of these advancements impact operations and facilities. Examples of areas where improvements are occurring include:

- Employee occupational safety to bloodborne and airborne pathogens and other communicable diseases
- Autopsy photography using enhanced techniques to document injuries
- Advancements in evidence collection for suspicious deaths

- Improved radiology techniques
- Greater need for specimen collection, preparation and storage for toxicological, pathological, and anthropological analyses
- Improved use of criminology techniques in firearm analyses, identification, etc.
- Greater use of computer applications for databases, investigative and autopsy reports, trauma research, etc.

Death data kept by the ME is highly valued by researchers in Public Health, Harborview, the University of Washington and community groups who follow trends in trauma, injury prevention and violence reduction. Computerized database information is maintained by the ME. It is expected that, using its computerized databases, the ME will be more involved with injury prevention research.

Facilities Issues. The ME's Office has many unique facility requirements including:

- A secured loading area, away from public viewing, for moving bodies in and out of the building
- Walk-in refrigerated area for storage of up to 50 bodies
- Separate refrigerated area for storage of decomposed and infectious human remains
- Freezer storage for tissue specimen
- Secured storage rooms for crime scene evidence, weapons, and decedents' personal property
- Autopsy area, including isolation autopsy room, for performing numerous autopsies concurrently
- Specialized lighting for autopsy photography equipment
- High efficiency ventilation system with appropriate air exhaust system
- Viewing room with separate ventilation system for observing autopsies
- Locker rooms/ areas for changing into/out of clean and contaminated gear
- Radiology facilities and associated developing capabilities
- Approved fume hood for chemical and biological specimens
- Appropriate viewing room for family members to view bodies
- Separate conference room for private meetings with family members
- Ample work space for investigative, autopsy and administrative staff

The present Medical Examiner facility was constructed at Harborview Medical Center (HMC) in 1975 with original total space of approximately 15,200 SF. It occupies two floors in the former South Wing.

Medical Examiner and Harborview Medical Center. There are many benefits for ME to be located at HMC, including:

- Close proximity to the region's Level I trauma Center (25% of the ME cases come from HMC).
- Numerous HMC services are provided the ME such as radiology, patient records, pathology, laboratory medicine, emergency, surgery, ICU, etc.
- HMC staff in trauma, surgery, and quality assurance rely on the ME for autopsy outcome information.

## 13889

- Shared training of medical students and residents.
- Increased need for ME mortality data by HMC Injury Prevention & Research Center, Trauma Registry, Quality Assurance, and University of Washington researchers.
- Use of Public Health Laboratory at HMC for communicable disease analysis.

Facilities. HMC's proposal to amend its Long-Range Capital Improvement Program includes demolition of the current ME space, because of severe seismic instability, and construction of up to approximately 17,000 net square feet of new space for the ME in a multi-use building (including a loading dock). A HMC capital project would finance the site development building shell and core, and a portion of the costs associated with the construction of interior improvements for the ME.

The estimated project cost for the Medical Examiner's Office's portion for the 17,000 net square feet of tenant improvements, with updated equipment, is \$ 5.9 million.