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way there since its 2001 merger.

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How Metro Center spun out of control

By Pamela Rust

Douglas County's Metro Center, with a price tag that's ballooned to more than a \$44 million and still isn't finished, is a case study in what can happen when policymakers give up their oversight role in a large construction project.

First proposed in 1998 as a \$17.5 million solution to an overcrowded jail, and then to address inefficiencies in city and county operations, it held the potential for a money-saving merger. Now county supervisors, who have long bragged about their fiscal restraint, are left with no option but increasing property taxes again to finish the project. The dilemma comes just as state officials are proposing to shift more costs for local services to local government to help ease escalating state budget problems.

With no final price tag in sight, this financial disaster is far from over, and the political fallout is just beginning.

"This project is out of control. Checks and balances have been missing," said Kay McKenzie, 2nd District county supervisor.

Here's how the county board lost that control of those finances, and the project's design.



Pamela Rust photo

A rear view of the Metro Center, under construction behind the Douglas County Courthouse in Superior.

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