New Justice Facility Programming-Level Operating Cost Analysis

Summary of Findings

It is critical at this early stage in the project to focus on the increased needs being addressed in the new facility: expanded behavioral health and medical services, programming, safety, and operational capacity. While the new facility is still in early concept development, and at a programming-level of design, operational costs in terms of the number of Full-time Equivalent (FTE) positions for various staff assignments can be estimated.

These estimates are likely to change as the design progresses, and more is known about the facility and its future operations. The proposed new facility, which offers approximately one-third more operating capacity, as well as new and currently unavailable behavioral health and medical beds, more programming, and a larger footprint, will require higher FTE counts and therefore greater operating costs for optimal operations.

For context, the current jail facilities are understaffed and fall short of optimal staffing and operating levels. Per the consultant's analysis the current staffing level is approximately 30% below (96 FTEs vs. 134 FTEs) what is desired for the existing facilities.

Initial analysis of the proposed facility indicates a staffing need of 141 FTEs to achieve optimal operating levels. When translated into cost of operations, a fully staffed new facility would cost an estimated 30% more than operating the existing jails at the current 96 FTE level, which is comparable to operating the current facilities at their optimal level.

As Table A shows, the Corrections Technicians positions used to calculate these figures do not yet exist, and the salaries are estimates at this time. However, these are lower-salaried positions compared to Deputy positions and potentially have a lower barrier to entry. The Sheriff's Office is currently working to develop these positions to fully staff the current and future facilities while keeping operational costs manageable.

Day One Operating Costs

Understanding the difficulty in both onboarding and funding an additional 45 FTEs within the next 3-4 years, the project team also reviewed alternatives that could potentially provide an opportunity to on-ramp the new facility. Table A shows an example of "Opening Day Minimum Needs" – a scenario that could provide a way to operate the new facility on opening day without the full staffing required for optimal operations. This would require 118 FTEs and cost an estimated 19% more than operating the existing facilities at the current 96 FTE level.

It should be emphasized that this is not a long-term staffing recommendation. The consultants believe the new facility will not be housing inmates at capacity on day one, and this scenario is only meant to plan for "day one" staffing. If the jail population gets closer to capacity and staffing remains low, overtime and staff turnover will likely to increase.

Cost Comparisons – Current vs. Future Jail

The cost escalations summarized above varied significantly across jail services and functions. A breakdown by category is provided with more detailed information is provided in Table A. Table A also provides 2027 food, healthcare, and facilities contracts, as well as their estimated costs for the new facility.

Custody Staff

The anticipated increase in Transport and Courts in the Budget Aligned plan considers restrictions on the types of judicial proceedings that would take place in the single courtroom currently planned in the new facility, treating the operations similar to what occurs at the jail courtroom at the existing downtown facility where primarily first appearances occur. This would require transport downtown for several non-trial related judicial services.

If a second courtroom were to be included, or if the judicial proceedings beyond just first appearances could occur in the single courtroom or virtual options could be expanded, then a reduction in 8 FTEs could be achieved, providing an estimated annual savings of $1.1 million. The project team understands that this is a highly desired part of the project and is continuing to explore ways to expand judicial services at the new facility, whether through capital or operational improvements. The Opening Day Minimum Needs FTE count for this area is optimistic in its approach and assumes that the judicial proceedings can be expanded either through design or operational means.

In the Security Operations section, part of the increase in staff is recommended based on the increase in population, and the need to move more people through a larger facility. This is also a new area that does not currently exist in either facility and will be where control of the flow of the facility, training staff, and other important functions occur. This is a current staffing deficiency that will be exacerbated in the new facility. The only way to reduce this need through design or capital considerations would be to reduce the jail bed count by half or more or eliminate this function altogether.

In the Intake/Transport/Release area, both the Opening Day Needs and Budget Aligned recommended staff level increases are driven by the design of the new facility. The current facility was originally designed with separate intake and release areas as is standard practice but was later remodeled to have these operations in one area. It is best practice to separate people entering and leaving a detention facility, and in doing so, it requires staff to be at those separate locations even if they are in the same general area. This is a high-risk area where people are coming into the facility with unknown risk factors and often at their worst – everything from overdose risk to seizures to other needs for incident response is common in this area and support for staffing here to maintain safety is a high priority.

In the housing areas, the need for increased staffing actually decreases from what is recommended for today's current facilities due to the efficiencies of not having two separate facilities. Overall, there are increases in staffing beyond current levels. On opening day, the work of the projected staff will need to be accomplished either with existing staff (which would mean paying overtime) or with increased FTEs on straight-time. Based on the concept-level sketch the project team is working with that lays out the housing units, there is an increase in the number of posts in the housing units due to the specialized housing and number of units proposed. The assumed posts, housing units, and FTEs required for each post are:

- 1 post – 4 units (Male General Population, Orientation, Restrictive Housing, Medium Custody) – 5.2 FTEs
- 1 post – 2 units (Male Restrictive Housing/Maximum Security, General Population Protective Custody/Behavioral Health Special Needs) – 5.2 FTEs
- 1 post – Female Housing Unit (mixed classifications) – 5.2 FTEs
- 1 post - 2 units – (Female Sub-Acute and Acute, Male Acute) – 5.2 FTEs
- 1 post -1 unit – Male Sub-Acute – 5.2 FTEs
- 1 post – 1 unit – Medical – 5.2 FTEs

This amount of post staffing is the same as the number of posts in the two existing facilities. The increase in Housing deputies is partly for the increased need for more monitoring, care, and pro-active population management. Since there will still be a significant amount of inmate movement throughout the facility, these FTEs are accounting for that interior transport, security checks on inmates that are locked down, standby security for professional services, and safety and relief for medical and other incident response. Additionally, these staff will provide relief for all posts throughout the facility. By eliminating the medical, acute behavioral health, sub-acute behavioral health, and/or maximum-security units, (or any combination thereof), some reduction in FTEs could be achieved by turning more units into general population units.

Programs/Classification

The increase in Programs/Classifications for the future imagines additional Classifications Technicians who are specialized staff working hand-in-hand with re-entry, and case-management to do more than just find an empty bed for people entering the facility, helping to better shape outcomes and reduce incidents during their stay in the facility. These could potentially be case workers, care managers, and behavioral health-focused staff as well.

Medical and Behavioral Health Contracted Services

The estimates for the increases in medical costs are very early assumptions based on the idea that more services will be provided in the new facility, and medical contract costs have not historically decreased year over year. In addition, there will be an increase in behavioral health staff to support the new facility and its proposed functions. The project team also believes that there will be some savings and efficiencies going from two facilities to one, and by expanding medical services in the new facility it will result in fewer transports out of the facility which will reduce the costs. These costs will be further refined as the design progresses.

Capital Investment Tradeoffs with Operating Costs

The project team identified the following areas where additional upfront capital investments would likely result in lower staffing needs and the associated operational cost savings.

- Additional Courtroom – this would result in an 8 FTE reduction in the Budget Alignment figures, saving approximately $1,100,000 in operating costs. These costs are likely higher once other transportation costs are factored in, as additional staffing is needed to transport more inmates downtown due to only having one courtroom.
- Adding visitation space for attorneys and other visiting professionals at the inmate housing units. This would reduce overall transportation within the facility. The exact figures on reduction are unknown currently as design has not progressed enough to estimate the reduction.

Opportunities remain to reduce operating costs through thoughtful design, as the design process has not begun in earnest. The project team is currently using a conceptual-level sketch of the housing area to make assumptions about staffing needs. Additionally, further reductions in overall square footage are still necessary to align the project with the budget. The team remains focused on creating flexible spaces when possible so that design decisions made in 2026-2027 don't lock the County into unavoidable fixed operational costs, though this is sometimes necessary given the realities of a detention facility.