



MEMO:

TO: Whatcom County Council
FROM: Tyler Schroeder, Deputy Executive
THROUGH: Satpal Sidhu, County Executive
DATE: June 20, 2023
RE: **Additional clarification on jail facility size and cost planning**

In an effort to provide additional clarity on certain components of jail facility planning, the Administration has prepared the following information for Council's review.

Jail Size and Expansion Formula

The draft ballot measure ordinance provides policy direction to consider regarding jail size and expansion under Section 5-1-(c): "...new, appropriately-sized jail facility based on a fair analysis of jail use, bookings, and population growth, taking into consideration strategic investments to avoid unnecessary incarceration; identifies and develops a mechanism for additional bed capacity if the facility reaches 85% of operational capacity (defined by national standards for a period of eight of the past twelve months); establishes collaborative protocols to utilize other county or regional jails to accommodate the bed needs of the County and cities when needed; and, in a last case scenario, relies on judicial authority to implement booking restrictions..."

The number of beds in a jail facility will be determined after review of multiple factors. These factors will be reviewed again after five years of the facility being operational to determine if additional beds are needed. The factors, which need to be weighted during review, include:

- **Jail Usage Variables** - Admission Rates, Average length of Stay, Average Daily Population, Average Bookings
- **Reduction of Booking Restrictions** – In each Municipality, Dept. of Corrections and tribal agencies
- **Active Outstanding Warrants**
- **Adjustment Factors** – Peaking Factor, Operational Capacity (85%), Classification Factor
- **Incarceration Prevention Reductions %** – Set target Recommendations - Review Spokane County from Jan. 20201
- **Crisis Relief Center Intake and other Behavioral Health Facility Reductions %**
- **Booking, Intake and Release Center and First Appearance Waiting Area**
- **Utilization of Alternative Programs** – Out-of-custody, electronic home detention, etc.
- **Population Growth** – Review OFM statistics

The County Comprehensive Plan Capital Facility Element provides for additional information regarding jail facility planning, including the following factors:

- projected population growth,
- State sentencing laws,
- alternative programs,
- treatment diversion programs,
- early release programs,
- the need to separate violent inmates,
- the need to separate inmates by gender,
- the need to separate inmates by other classification considerations,
- average length of stay,
- peak inmate populations and available funding.
- existing facilities may be expanded, remodeled and/or new facilities developed in response to changing need.

Cost Estimates and Facility Design

Councilmembers have requested summary information on jail facility cost estimates and design. Preliminary work has focused on designing a space that is safe for incarcerated individuals and those who work and visit there, provides appropriate space and equipment to provide incarcerated individuals with dignity and needed services, and is versatile to accommodate changes in the population. The Administration welcomes further dialogue regarding the design of the jail facility. Further work will be subject to policy, budget, and contract decisions by the Whatcom County Council.

The Administration will work with a bond consultant to prepare for issuance of a 30-year bond for construction of the facility, including development of a finance and funding plan and payment schedule based on tax collections. We anticipate bond payments to occur from 2024 to 2054, with interest-only payments the first three years.

The cost estimates the administration prepared for Council were conceptual and were undertaken to show the cost differences between a horizontal, mid-vertical, and vertical facility. This was done by a cost estimator using a "design block format" to show the flow of the facility and approximate square footage. They will be refined in the future when site, capacity and design criteria are identified.

The basis of the size used for the cost estimate was a percent increase in existing capacity. The current Whatcom County jail capacity is 359 beds between the downtown facility and work center. According to the National Institute of Corrections, a facility needs approximately 20% additional capacity to allow for operational factors such as peaking/classification. With our existing 359 beds, calculated with a peaking/classification factor, that leads to a minimum replacement jail to be 430 beds. This is not a size recommendation; rather it is a baseline. At 440 beds, there will likely still be booking restrictions in place.

The Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) discussed a list of components that could be included in a correctional facility design concept.² The Justice Project Needs Assessment Implementation Plan includes the following desired features of a new jail facility:

- Designed to reflect best practices for safety, efficiency, and technology.
- Safe for incarcerated individuals and those who work and visit there.
- Designed with spaces & equipment integrated throughout facilities to provide incarcerated individuals with dignity and needed services (e.g., dedicated, confidential behavioral health treatment space; visitation spaces; medical and dental care treatment space; provider/staff workspace; education & vocational training; outside spaces for recreation, gardens, natural light, and fresh air).
- Versatile to accommodate changes in the population.
- A physical environment that contributes to improved mental health (e.g., natural light, use of color, natural beauty, spatial layout).
- A centralized booking area from which one can resolve cases and gain access to a range of incarceration and diversion options.
- Co-location of a jail and behavioral health treatment center.
- Space for individuals to call their own (e.g., separate rooms, dividers).

This list was compiled with a detailed inventory of facilities needs by Whatcom County Corrections, in consultation with behavioral health and medical staff and informal discussion with individuals incarcerated at the Whatcom County jail. This list informed the cost estimate, but is subject to further discussion and decision-making. Ultimately, the chosen design features will be helpful in refining the cost estimates.

Initial Design Feature “wish list”:

- Intake and Release
 - Dedicated open concept intake
 - Dedicated release
 - Inmate property storage
 - Intake and release supervisor office
 - 5+ office spaces for administration and contractors
- Facility Operations
 - Scalable or large kitchen
 - Garbage and recycling center accessible by vendor
 - Dedicated laundry separate from the kitchen
 - Telecom expandability
 - Sophisticated technology to allow virtual psychiatric, psychological, and other behavioral health services to be provided
 - Controls for air, water, and electrical for each unit and cell so each unit can be operated separately
 - Programming space for specific functions such as culinary arts, technical certification, horticulture and gardening, and GED/college
- Design features for all housing options (including medical unit)
 - Natural lighting, use of texture, natural beauty and color
 - Prefabricated individual cells for each person (bed, sink/toilet, desk, chair)
 - Estimate 32 cells per unit

² There was a [presentation](#) and discussion at the March 20, 2023 IPRTF meeting. Lieutenant Ericksen [discusses](#) the Jail Design “Wish List” in more detail at around 39 minutes.

- Large day rooms
- Rec space and exercise equipment
- Library, TV and other media, library storage
- Laundry, laundry and uniform storage in unit
- Classroom and activity space for programs
- Video visiting and video court
- Safety cell
- Chalk board
- Attorney and other professional booths
- Restrooms and showers, restrictive housing shower
- Medical unit
 - Medical exam rooms
 - Office space for practitioners
 - X-Ray equipment
 - Mental health and medical close watch housing including safety cells
 - Dental suite including x-ray
 - Recreation area
 - Nurses station
 - Office space for 28 medical staff members
 - Pass through from main hallways with bathrooms
 - Restrooms for staff and inmates
 - Employee break room
 - Mother's lactation rooms
 - Employee locker room
 - Mental health room
 - Dental/vision room
 - Psychiatric evaluation and observation housing
 - Safety cells
 - All doors large enough for hospital beds
 - Restraint system storage
 - Classroom and activity space for programs
 - Attorney and other professional booths
 - Video courts
 - Showers
 - Negative pressure cell(s)
 - Library
 - TV and other media
 - Tablet charging location
 - Chalkboard
- Behavioral Health Wing
 - Offices or bullpen for 16+ people
 - If using a bullpen, 1 confidential pass-through room for every two staff
 - 1 space to hold psychiatric clinics
 - 2 group rooms scheduled by mental health with capacity for 18 people per room
 - Storage space for re-entry gear and supplies
 - Space for working with involuntary commitments and people refusing medications
 - 2-3 additional confidential spaces for other community partners
- Staff areas
 - Separate and secure entrance
 - Briefing room

- Conference rooms
- Classrooms for training
- Computer lab for tech related training
- Tactical training space
- Mock scene cells
- Records storage
- Sleeping quarters, locker rooms, break room, workout room, lactation room
- Offices in hub for approximately 26 people
- Control booth with 2 redundant stations
- Dedicated parking for staff and contractors
- Space for childcare
- Designed to reflect best practices for safety, efficiency, and technology.

Whatcom County expects discussion with Council, the IPRTF, and the Finance and Operations Advisory Board to further develop and modify this list prior to construction.