

Jail Planning Task Force
Recommendations to County Council
December 6, 2011

I. INTRODUCTION

The Jail Planning Task Force ("JPTF") is making three recommendations to the County Council at this time:

- 1) Retain a professional jail planner;
- 2) Continue the Jail Planning Task Force;
- 3) Re-establish the Law & Justice Council.

The JPTF has held 12 meetings over four and a half months. During those meetings we have discussed at length the issues and tasks we were charged with in resolution 2011-014. In September 2011, the JPTF unanimously agreed that due to overcrowding, life/safety and physical plant concerns in the main jail facility, Whatcom County needs a new jail.

With the consent of the County Council, we hired a nationally known jail planner and architect, Jay Farbstein, Ph.D., to assist us with creating the framework for the process of planning a new jail. After his visit Dr. Farbstein presented a written report containing "observations and recommendations" to the JPTF of how Whatcom County should proceed in planning and building a new jail. His observations confirmed something the JPTF had realized over its months of work:

"While the JPTF is clearly a very dedicated, hard-working and intelligent group, it has been charged with responsibilities well beyond the capabilities of citizens and corrections professionals."

"Jails are highly complex buildings and their planning, design and construction are critical to their mission and long-term operations and maintenance. For most jurisdictions, including Whatcom County, a main jail is built only once every generation. Therefore, the expertise available within the jurisdiction is limited."

The JPTF remains committed to addressing all of the charges laid out in Resolution 2011-014 and moving forward with building a new jail. However, in light of the above, and in recognition of the magnitude of this project, we are recommending that the County Council and County Executive take immediate action on the following items.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

A) RETAIN A PROFESSIONAL JAIL PLANNER

The County should initiate the process to hire a corrections/jail planner. The corrections/jail planner is not another consultant; instead, an experienced planner will assist the County in

addressing and completing the first three phases of the new jail project. These phases include: (1) updating the current needs assessment; (2) completing a feasibility study for future facility options; and, (3) detailing specific operational and facility requirements (programming phase). Retaining a jail planner was strongly recommended by both the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) and Jay Farbstein.

It is anticipated the scope of work for the planner would include at least the following:

- A review and update of the existing needs assessment completed by the Omni Group and HDR;
- Collection and analysis of additional data that will create a more detailed picture of the jail populations, and how this resource is used by our criminal justice system in Whatcom County;
- Review population trends in the County in general, as well as the criminal justice system, for the purpose of estimating the number of beds and amount of space that will be needed in a new facility, factoring in continued use and growth of jail alternatives and diversion programs.

It is anticipated the planner will then utilize the statistical information to complete a feasibility study exploring facility options, estimating the capital and operational costs of a new jail, and present funding options. Using an expert jail planner for this process is an essential step in ensuring the County arrives at a feasible financial plan to pay for the construction and continued operations of a new jail.

In the third step, the jail planner will use the information gathered to detail specific operational requirements, and provide preliminary design elements of the new facility.

The information and analysis provided by a professional jail planner is crucial in the decision-making process for constructing the new jail. It is estimated the cost of this planner will be approximately \$200,000, and these three phases will take up to one year to complete.

The Council should be aware that there will be additional future requirements in this process, including:

- Hiring (or assigning from existing staff) a full-time project manager, no later than the programming phase of the jail planner's contract;
- Engaging the services of a contracted real estate professional to assist with the site selection phase of the new jail project;
- Design, bidding, and construction of the facility and occupancy/transition planning will be the last two phases of the project.

Attached is a copy of the Jay Farbstein & Associates, Inc. report and generic scope of services. We encourage you to consider this as a guideline for making progress towards a new jail.

B) CONTINUE THE JAIL PLANNING TASK FORCE

Our second recommendation is that the Jail Planning Task Force be authorized to continue as an advisory group to the County and the jail planner to provide critical community involvement in this project. Task Force members desire to complete the work assigned them by the County Council, and will be able to do so with the assistance of the proposed jail planner.

We view the continued participation of the JPTF through the entire jail planning and construction process as an essential element in gaining community support of the County's final decisions regarding the size, location, design, and construction of the new jail.

C) RE-ESTABLISH THE LAW & JUSTICE COUNCIL

In parallel with hiring the corrections planner, the JPTF recommends that Whatcom County re-establish the Law and Justice Council, and request that they review practices and policies within the entire criminal justice system that impact the jail population. The focus of this evaluation should be to improve justice system efficiencies, implement programs that demonstrate long-term reductions in recidivism rates, and increase the use of appropriate jail diversion programs.

UNANIMOUSLY ADOPTED THIS 30th day of November 2011.

WHATCOM COUNTY
JAIL PLANNING TASK FORCE



Peter R. Dworkin, Co-Chair

WHATCOM COUNTY
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Lisa McShane, Co-Chair