

# SAC Facilities Survey Results

September 7, 2022

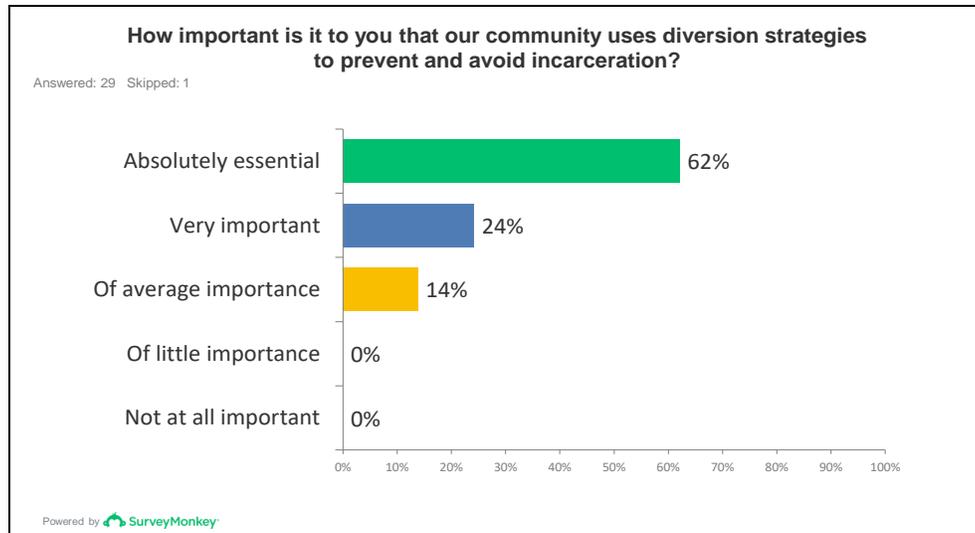
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# Responses

30 Responses

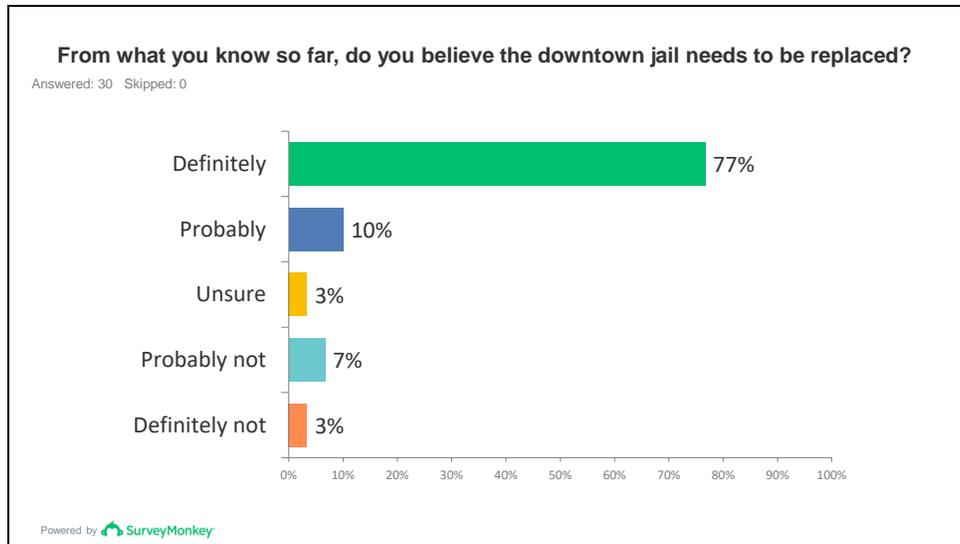
Out of 38 SAC members  
(+ 4 who share seats)

~75% Response Rate



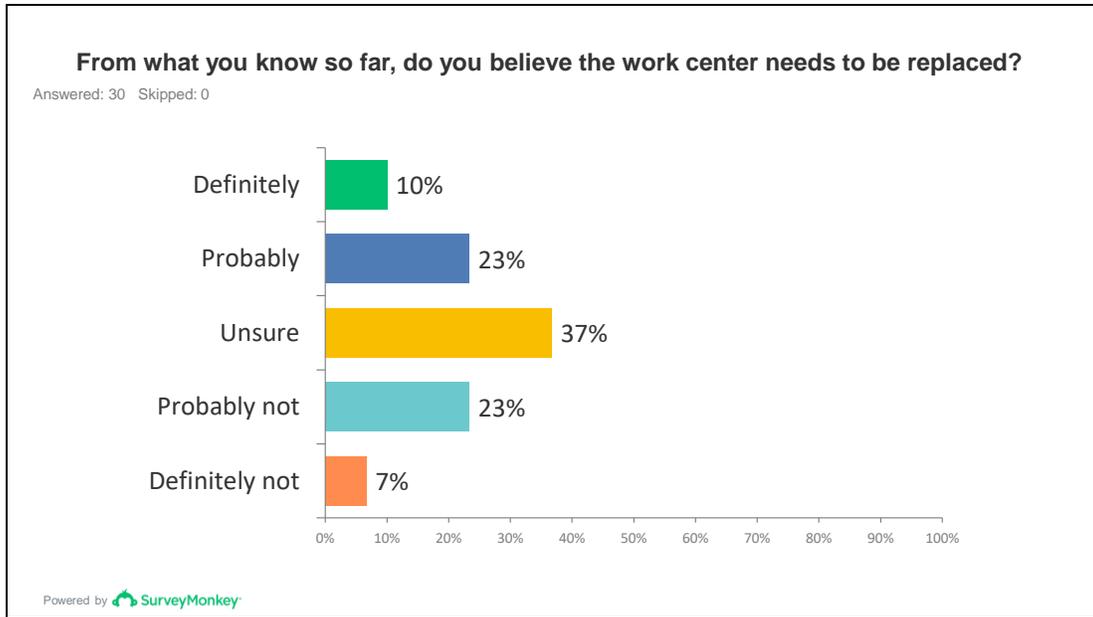
**Comments:**

- Diversion Service - a service provided to prevent accumulation of trauma and compliance burdens that limit the individual’s ability to function beneficially in our society.
- I believe that the City of Blaine has been part of a diversion program.
- It is equally important people are held accountable for their actions. Avoidance of people who seriously need to be incarcerated is a significant problem in our community right now for a variety of factors.
- Incarceration is vital, at times, to protect the community where less restrictive options are not available to meet safety needs. Where options exist that provide more evidence-based corrective and healing options while maintaining safety, these must be available. I believe that socially and economically, evidence-based diversion strategies that offer correction and healing must be considered wherever possible and are a good investment.
- Incarceration is a last resort. Incarceration is NOT the ultimate answer to social ills and positive behavior modification. Incarceration causes a myriad of social ills in itself, it is grossly expensive, and is not a practical answer.
- It is very important to solve the problems causing crimes, so that we can lower recidivism. Diversion, treatment and restoration can eliminate some of the causes of crime.
- If people believe there are no consequences for committing crime there is no incentive to act within the norms of society.
- We should divert in some cases, but there are other cases that need incarceration. I think the current situation (lack of jail space) show us what happens when we do not incarcerate certain criminals.
- Aside from the antiquated nature of the jail facility, the primary problem in all offices related to criminal justice is numbers. Bring the numbers in the system down and much of the pressure will come off.
- It depends on the crime. Any crime that creates a victim should have equal consequences to the perpetrator.
- When it is safe for the community to allow someone to do an alternative.



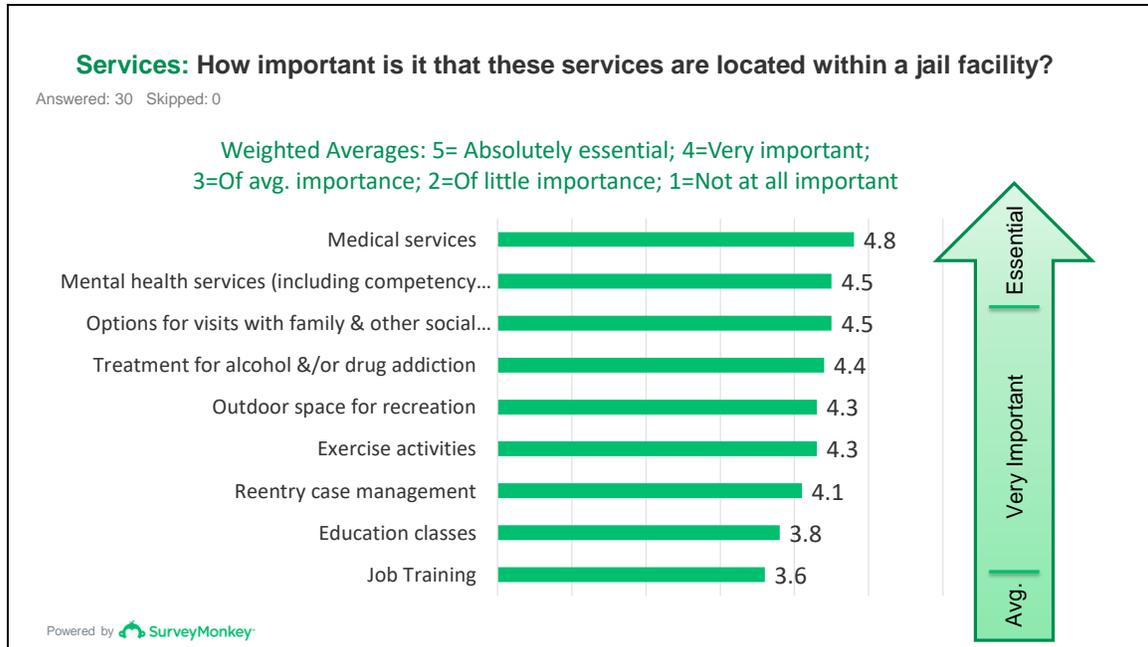
**Comments:**

- It would be helpful to see it and further investigate what a scenario would look like where the jail was renovated rather than replaced.
- The downtown jail is absolutely unsafe as a workplace and unfit for a jail. Security is poor; mental and physical health conditions remain unaddressed. The due process rights of both the pretrial and post-conviction inmates are denied due to logistical reasons alone.
- Unless there's some structural or foundational problems we haven't heard about yet, I haven't heard anything that makes me believe that the jail can't be improved without building a new one.
- I have visited it more than once. So sad we have to continue to use. it.
- I do not have the expertise to determine whether the downtown jail can be fully remodeled adequately and whether or not this is the same as effectively "replaced". I believe that the current downtown jail, as it stands, is not safe and appropriate to fulfill the need to keep staff, inmates, visitors, and associated professionals safe and healthy. The structure either needs to be 'replaced' in place (as determined by an expert in this area) or replaced otherwise.
- Do you mean replaced in a different location? No. The downtown jail needs restoration and updating. It is essential for the county jail to be near the county courthouse. Keep in mind that most people I've talked to are concerned about what happens (and doesn't happen) inside a jail—no matter the condition and location of the building.
- My information on this matter comes to me from a recent jail worker, whose judgment I trust. They say it is an "inhumane" place for prisoners and staff.
- Look at the time line that I asked to be sent out. It has had problems from the day we moved from the 6th floor of the county building to the current poorly constructed jail. All of its systems have and are continuing to fail. It has been declared unsafe and inadequate since the early 1990s. It hasn't changed.
- It is woefully lacking in so many areas. We need a modern facility that can house not only the inmates, but programs that the inmates need.



**Comments:**

- It serves the purpose of housing the lesser-violent offenders who are eligible for jail alternatives.
- We haven't been given any info one way or the other on this.
- The work center will likely need to be remodeled and updated depending on needs relating to an expected updated community justice plan.
- It needs to be upgraded from its minimum security infrastructure if it is to be utilized long term. It was designed and built as a temporary facility to address booking restriction while a new jail was being constructed.
- It should help train people to do needed jobs in our community.
- The current work center facility was only to be a temporary facility. Look back at the history. It was designed as a temporary facility to be easily sold as a building compatible with other Irongate businesses and facilities. The money from the sale was to be used to help pay for the new jail and work center.
- Any new facility to replace the downtown jail should either be located next to the work center or incorporate the work center's beds and services into the future. If there is no forward momentum on replacing the downtown jail then I don't think the work center needs to be replaced.
- I think there may be useful changes made to the facility.
- It's relatively new...

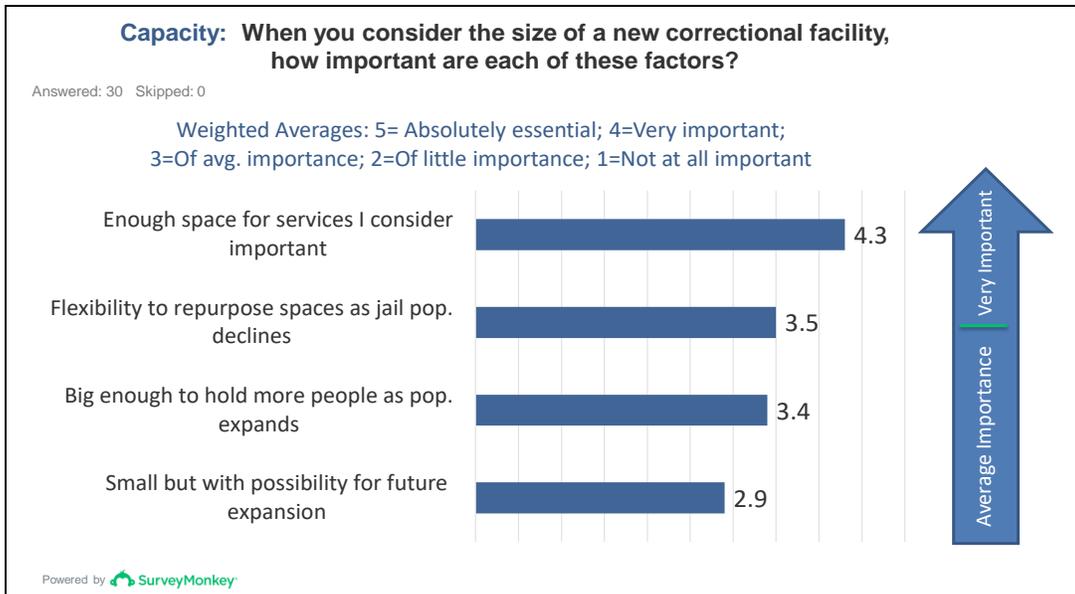


#### Other Important Services Within a Jail:

- Secure/private rooms to meet and confer with legal counsel
- The ones I shared were very important make sense to have outside the jail services too. Actually all of them do.
- Meditation classes, yoga, spiritual guidance
- Mental health and drug treatment services should be adequate to keep people stable and safe during their stay but it is not appropriate to use jail as a mental health or drug use treatment center. Folks that need that should not be in jail, they should be in a more appropriate treatment center. I think jail needs to stay in its own wheelhouse. But yes, things like suboxone and mental health screenings and psychiatric treatment should be available in jail. Also, while forced competency restoration is apparently perfectly legal, it is violent and appalling and I do not support creating more room for it in our jail.
- Answer to MH Services of "absolutely essential" is directed toward MH Services specifically. Multiple issues exist relative to competency restoration occurring in the jail. We have competency evaluation occurring currently.
- I believe that all of the above services need to be provided in a jail facility (especially acute-care services) however not if they will replace services outside of the facility. I believe that the primary role of jail is safety when less restrictive options are not available. Those people for whom less restrictive options are not available, must be provided with opportunities to heal, grow, and learn AND the community needs to invest in less restrictive options for all of these services. With improved digital communications options, services that are currently being offered outside of the jails may be able to be provided within the jails as well. Regardless, acute-care services must be available when a person who needs them is in jail custody. Additional services essential within the jail: Domestic Violence and Anger Management evaluations and treatment ("perpetrator" and "victim") Diverse spiritual / religious programming Adequate nutrition
- Space for AA and NA meetings. Group therapy space.

- Ability to connect with incoming recovery panels AA, NA, CA if not in person via zoom
- I'm sure it's included in "social supports" but having Recovery services being in meetings, is vital. Even offering sponsorship would be great also.
- Library, space for support groups
- Jails are for short term stays, and are not prisons. They are primarily triage centers, not long-term correction facilities. Most people locked up in jail are in crisis, and need to be regarded appropriately so they're not unduly traumatized. Don't make the problems worse in a system that purports to be making things better. Traditionally, those who have their legal competency questioned have been removed from jail and separated from the punitive jail setting because that is the ethical thing to do. They are not mentally fit for the criminal process, and so are removed from it. They are removed and returned only if they are restored. They are taken away from jail because they don't belong in a jail. They are removed from society and put into a mental hospital, not a jail. It is absolutely a social step backwards to turn the jail into a mental health asylum as well (unless we redefine what a jail is). It sends mixed messages and further stigmatizes mental illness. The two institutions are separate for a reason. There is a saying: do not rip down a fence before you fully understand why it was there to begin with. The State hospital system has failed in keeping up, which is why counties are now faced with this issue. But putting traditional state mental health services into a jail is something to think twice about. Further, the state should foot the bill for counties picking up the slack. If incompetent people need to be removed from society to be restored, there is a civil commitment process. Many important (and expensive) services can be better provided in satellite facilities. Regarding education, I think spiritual support should be addressed. Education for reentry, not academics, is essential. If a person is going to prison, perhaps education on prison etiquette would be helpful. There is no reason why Whatcom prisoners can't be the model prison inmates in the Washington correctional system. Practical education for what is relevant in the moment makes sense (not necessarily academics). Education about what to expect in court, how to behave, and how to help their lawyer is essential. I think of this more as coaching, not teaching. Outdoor air and physical activity is essential, but shouldn't be used as an excuse to build a lavish jail. DISCUSSIONS SURROUNDING NUTRITION AND JAIL MEALS ARE AS IMPORTANT AS DISCUSSION SURROUNDING MEDICAL CARE. What people eat affects behavior and wellbeing. It is negligent to ignore this factor.
- Reentry and Job training should exist within a separate organization not related to the jail.
- This question is hard to answer because while I think all of these services are essential, I'm not convinced that a jail facility is the best place to receive them. For example education classes, job training, exercise, mental health treatment, alcohol drug treatment I believe are more effective outside of an incarcerated environment.
- Re-entry, education and job training are all absolutely essential in our community. The only reason I put them as "very important" is because the question was "located within a jail facility." I think the grass roots and connection to those services should be in the facility but most individuals only stay a short amount of days (less than 20 days) in jail. So, connect individuals to the services that should continue (re-entry, housing, education, job training) once an individual is released. That is the most important time. The same can be said for the treatment and mental health services. Treatment and Mental Health in the facility should be at an emergency level or to do evaluations to help process court cases. But, those longer term services that truly help individuals should be located outside of the jail facility.

- All these services are important. I think most should be in the jail or nearby. The competency restoration could be offsite.
- Those items I marked "very important" may just as usefully be located at a nearby non-jail site that is readily accessible to those who are being detained.
- So many people housed at the jail are mentally ill that quick evaluation, medications, and counseling is absolutely necessary. The use of solitary confinement should be limited to those who cannot be in population.
- Options for visits with family and other social support would be in best interest to prevent contraband in the jail by virtual or phone contact only. Safety for all in the jail.



### Other Important Factors Regarding Facility Size:

- Jail size should be driven by a community public safety needs assessment.
- The constraints of the jail have allowed innovation.
- If there are more jail beds available, we will fill more jail beds. We do not need to incarcerate more people. Even if we build a giant jail with tons of rooms for services, I would not be surprised it wasn't long before the jail was full so we started putting people in the rooms intended for services and had "no room for services" again.
- It needs to be start about 450 to 500 and able to grow or contract.
- This is a very complex question since there are multiple variables. If the community invests in less restrictive options (work center, staffed housing, treatment, etc) it will provide more flexibility as populations shift. The main jail should have some flexibility based on population and changing programming AND the community must also consider less restrictive options in separate structures.
- The size of the jail will depend on what other options exist for people being removed from the community. (Will there be a separate lock down mental health facility for civil and voluntary commitments?)
- Consider rewording last factor to: Flexibility to repurpose spaces as jail population increases or declines
- Our county has rejected a plan for a large jail 2 times. The message is clear. In our county, as I recall, 70 mil is devoted to law enforcement and 30 mil for social services. While I'm glad LE is well paid and robust, I know social service are terribly lacking. Let's correct this imbalance.
- Enough space would include the ability for staff to have options for secure outdoor break area and proper locker rooms.
- Back in 1997 the National Institute of Corrections said that the jail was exceeding the population for which it was designed and that is was too small for the county population and since then the population of the county grown. The NIC is probably better able to make those kind of judgements than a group of citizens who do not have that kind of expertise.

- The size of the correctional facility should be built to the size that we need today. With room on the property to be able to expand in the future if the need arises. The size needs to recognize an operational component that a full facility is about 80% of the bed capacity. The facility needs to have enough spaces to provide room for services (medical, booking, behavioral health, etc.).
- I rated "big enough" (option 3) higher than "small" (option 2) with the thought that "big enough" should be clearly limited in capacity so that it does not become "too big" and also with the thought that current cost of construction is always going to be significantly lower than the future cost of any expansion.
- Look at schools: They're built with "so much space" and in less than 2 years they need more space. Build for prevention of needing to add on later. It will save time and money by doing it all at once.



#### Other Important Factors Regarding Location:

- If someone is receiving treatment for mental health and substance abuse offsite it would be important that they can access them.
- What land do we already own?
- Zoom can be utilized for arraignments and other court appearances if facility ends up being located too far from courthouse.
- There's absolutely no reason why a jail shouldn't be near a school or a residential area. However it is absolutely essential that it is not in the middle of nowhere. Inmates can be released any time of day or night. Many have no friends or family to come get them and if they had a vehicle, it's been impounded. Jail is an incredibly isolating experience and it is that way intentionally. It is already so difficult for an incarcerated person to maintain relationships. If the jail is in some difficult to get to area, that will make it even harder.
- Cost of the land
- Favor Ferndale site. A DT Bellingham jail not necessary.
- It shouldn't be downtown. We cannot have the largest new structure in our downtown be a jail. That would send the wrong message entirely. Also I don't see how we'd build an expandable structure in downtown. It likely should be on LaBounty but there are political issues with that. Division Street seems a happy medium.
- Consideration must be given to whether a location will disproportionately impact already marginalized populations.
- One that supports security, ease of flow to and from and grows with the community.
- The jail must be near the courthouse. Defense lawyers must be given liberal access to their clients. In person visiting (by professionals and family) is also essential.

- I worked at the Irongate location. It is on a bus line. It is within 2-3 miles from downtown, and all other needed services. Not too close to residential. La Bounty is too far away. Sell it.
- It should be easily accessible by all law enforcement agencies. Density of traffic in and around Bellingham will continue to increase and become more and more of a problem. The LaBounty property is only a few minutes from downtown Bellingham but is much more accessible to all county agencies.
- All of these items are important when considered in a vacuum. They need to be balanced together and consider available properties before making one more important than the other. Access to the criminal legal system and resources are important but that does not necessarily mean physical proximity. Coordination and access to main transportation roads to get to the CSS and hospital is more important than next door. Most locations will be able to have a bus line and access to public transit. Neighbors will be concerned about proximity to schools and high-density areas, however, there is very little land use issues outside of a facility.
- We need enough land so if the facility needs to grow in the next 30-50 years, we have the space to do this. The current location does not offer this.
- It is important that those in criminal justice have easy access (quick and close) to those incarcerated.
- Far from ALL RESIDENTIAL areas is needed. No need to have home values tank due to a jail in their neighborhood.
- Public defender staff spend a lot of time in the jail working with clients but also spend a lot of time in the court. To keep the system as efficient as possible the jail and court should be in close proximity to one another.

## What info does the SAC need now to better understand what to recommend regarding a jail or work center?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 11

- Public health and safety needs assessment
- I haven't heard any discussion about what a renovation process of the current facilities would look like. I understand that many people in law enforcement, local government, legal system, don't want to explore this option, but given the fact that the effort to get voters to vote for a new jail has failed twice, it might be wise to think about a scenario where that happens again and how we can use current facilities to meet our needs, while expanding services/programs to reduce incarceration. I feel fairly certain that this would pass with voters.
- The jail needs to be prepared to receive offenders in both extreme mental distress as well as physical conditions such as drug withdrawal or infectious disease, in such a way as to protect and support the other inmates as well as jailers and deputies for whom this is a daily operation.
- We are told that there is no room at the jail and police are forced to let dangerous criminals free because of it. However, from my perspective, there are open beds. There are also many people who are incarcerated who are not dangerous. We're told there isn't enough space for attorneys to meet with their clients and yet I am able to use an attorney booth almost every time I come to the jail. Our nation has the highest rate of incarcerated people in the world by FAR and yet we're being told it's not enough.
- I do not have any direct knowledge. However, from a practical point of view, I think that treatment facilities for addiction and mental health should be part of the jail facility. I have heard, though, that non-jail patients do not want to go to a "jail area" for voluntary treatment of mental health or addiction problems.
- I love the idea of getting more opinions from previously incarcerated people within the community (such as myself). I have previously been incarcerated at both the downtown jail and at the Work Center. I have absolutely no intentions of going back there as a prisoner. A mentor, ABSOLUTELY!! The idea of having all the services listed above available to inmates would be amazing. Removing the drugs from my life, slowed gave me the opportunity to become a productive member of society with is why I am willing to do anything and everything I can to help open our societies eyes on the stigma of addiction
- I think that we desperately need numbers with which to consider recommendations. For example: How much does it cost to incarcerate a person? How much does it cost to provide electronic home monitoring? How much does it cost to provide various less restrictive options such as treatment? How much (if any) do we save over a 5 or 10 year period if we provide various treatment alternatives vs incarceration. For every dollar we spend on mental health services or housing services or SUD trx, we save \$\_\_\_ on future incarceration. We need numbers so that the community can make important decisions about priorities and investments. I believe we also need to focus on evidence-based options when considering recommendations.
- Cost analysis of remodeling or adding to current facility versus building a new one.
- Hire a professional planner for sizing. This person can meet with a committee who will add the specific needs of this planning group.

- I'd like more information about possible jail locations being considered, and I'd like to know the number of people who are in civil commitments and whether competency and restoration (in criminal cases) can be handled outside of the jail setting, while still accommodating their visitors). I'd like to know more about the budget and where the money will come from.
- Consistent, constructive public messaging is crucial for the success of this effort. I respectfully suggest a marketing/PR sub-group be formed to focus on public outreach, participation, and support.
- There are MANY people in our own county - groups of people (untapped resource?) many with long-term recovery who are willing and able to help but unsure how in need of direction - we can possibly use them as a good useful resource.
- All jail facilities should be in close proximity as well as relocating the Sheriff's office. We have found out that video conferencing works just fine for most cases and the need to transport inmates has been greatly reduced.
- What criminal-legal policies and practices and diversion, support, or treatment services need to be developed or expanded to prevent or reduce unneeded reliance on incarceration. An understanding of best practices for determining capacity and accommodating anticipated growth. Costs estimates for all these factors and a reasoned way to triage desired elements of our recommendations in light of cost considerations.
- We talk about a lot of existing and new programs. It would be nice to have data on the effectiveness of the program. How well do they actually keep criminals from re-offending.
- The atmosphere of the jail should be less patterned after a prison and more patterned after a holding center. Skagit has done a good job of this, at least in the reception area.
- The cost of living in Bellingham is extremely high. More taxes creates higher cost of living. How much will this cost each taxpayer...AND can inmates work to pay off their "inmate" fees. That would be a great contribution of responsibility and accountability for crimes committed and discipline needed for daily life.
- We must limit our wish list to what the community will support. It is critical that this next vote pass.

## Additional Comments

- There are so many things that would be far more productive to spend our money on than a new jail. We could start by providing incarcerated people with some fresh fruit or maybe a second blanket, for starters. We could start to allow visitors again. There are many, many booths so there is no reason why there's not enough space for friends and family to visit. We could spend that money on housing so there would be less crimes of desperation. We could fund more beds at the domestic violence shelter so people could leave more easily and escalation could be avoided. We could just stop arresting so many people. That's really the ultimate diversion, just don't arrest them. It's also free. When people are arrested, they often lose their jobs, they're evicted, everything they own is thrown away, their support network is destroyed because the jail makes it so difficult to maintain outside relationships, their children are put in foster care, their pets are put up for adoption if they're not left to starve to death in their empty apartment, their cars are impounded. No amount of services or rehabilitation can undo all of that harm.
- Diversion is key. Put less people in jail. Utilize civil commitment processes more. Recognize the difference between criminal and civil processes. Non-medical intervention in the jail ought to be a part of the conversation. It's the way of the future. Nutrition, meditation, and various physical movements (such as yoga) are underutilized in our current system. Neuro feedback and other modalities are also underutilized. The current nutrition practices in the jail are embarrassing and ignorant. Diet affects behavior and wellbeing. This is so well recognized, that current practices border on negligence. Medical and jail industry money has dominated the discussion at the expense of other legitimate modalities of behavior modification and wellbeing. Restorative justice principles (or conversely, a philosophy of punishment and retribution) ought to be established to guide this jail building process so decision makers have guiding principles to follow. Whatcom County seems to be moving from a retribution system to a restorative system, while failing to acknowledge that Washington State's official sentencing philosophy remains "just deserts" or retribution. We need to acknowledge that we are going against the grain here and that we are truly breaking the mold. The resulting cognitive dissonance can be resolved by acknowledging this, and openly implementing restorative justice principles in ways that don't conflict with state law. Again, this justice project is in dire need of guiding principles. I believe that restorative justice principles ought to prevail. Regardless of what principles are adopted (restorative, punitive, etc), we need them. Time is of the essence. We need to move this process along, but not at the expense of making lasting changes.
- Let's discuss when is the best time to bring this issue before the voters. 2023 or 2024?
- To get help with planning the total budget for the bill, ask experts from other areas or states. Especially because we have never planned for so many services before, but other communities have.
- We have the land, a design and a plan. We have spent years of study and thousands of dollars already. Let's start with what we have, we can always make some modifications. Don't let the city of Bellingham dictate what we do! That's what happened in the last vote.
- In my opinion we have a crisis. Crime in our county is rapidly expanding as we have no facility capacity to house our criminals.
- The jail needs to facilitate easy access. Interview rooms, video conferencing, telephone access, all need to be incorporated into the facility plan.
- Bootcamp like at <https://youtu.be/y60I2MVAd04> works. Please consider.