



Why do we need a new Jail and Sheriff's Office?

Our current jail and sheriff's office was built starting in 1965

Additions were put on in the 90's to deal with overcrowding

The Jail is in continuous use 24 hours a day 365 days a year. Because of this, the building deteriorates at an increased rate compared to other buildings.

The age of the building makes it extremely expensive to make repairs. It is difficult to find parts to repair items. When these parts are found they are often quite expensive.

When the jail was built in 1965, the inmate population was much different. Alcohol and/or misdemeanor offenders, short length of stay and few in number. Most of the jail beds were occupied by sentenced offenders who were convicted of low-level offenses.

Today's inmates pose more risk and put greater demands on the facility. The jail population is almost all felony cases and those with mental health and drug issues. Felony filings in court are extremely high for a county our size.

The linear design of the jail does not provide needed separation of inmates, nor the space needed for longer term higher risk inmates. Space for Sheriff operations, administration and support spaces such as secure evidence storage is extremely limited, interfering with daily operations.

Working conditions for employees are substandard. (See review by comp one)

Why now?

The current Board of Commissioners are in favor of putting this request in front of the voters. They believe a new facility is needed and is a priority for the county.

The ballot initiative is .9800 mill levy for 30 years. The plan is for the jail to be built alongside the current facility. The millage will pay for construction financing. Approving the millage request will give current and future commissioners the authority to levy up to .98mil. They will have the authority levy less as well. The actual levy will be determined each year until approval expires in 30 years.

The jail committee that was created by the commissioners and Sheriff has researched conditions, projected needs, and alternative solutions.

How was the planning of the new jail conducted?

Studies have been done over the past 20 years to deal with the issues at the facility. The larger studies, conducted by the National Sheriff's Association (NSA) and the Byce and Associates study dealt with current conditions and projected figures based on many factors. (BOTH STUDIES ARE ONLINE AT

TUSCOLACOUNTY.ORG) Past studies were brought forth years ago to “remodel” the facility and those plans were never implemented as it was decided they were very costly and not fixing the major issues. Other investigations have been done by the County’s work comp company and county insurance carrier. Both pointed out glaring deficiencies in the current facility. Based on meetings, research, checking court records and documents, several jail committees have decided the only option if for a new facility.

How big will the new facility be?

The new facility will be (approximately) 71,600 square feet, initially providing 120 long term beds in addition to short term holding space. The current facility can hold 92 inmates, however due to restrictions from DOC it is limited to 87. Any more than that and overcrowding has to be declared. In addition, if future needs showed more beds it is designed to add beds without increasing the overall size of the jail. This jail will be in service for many decades.

WHY do we need a 120 bed jail? How was this number determined?

Long term studies as stated previously examined current conditions such as booking data, county demographics, case filings and many more factors (see reports) to come up with a figure. The study done by Bryce suggested a 120-140 bed facility. By building this at 120 beds it could be expanded for minimal cost in the future if needed.

In addition to long term beds, short term, (72 hours or less), are vital to the jail operation. 10 individual holding cells will be available for quarantine purposes, mental health observation and drug usage. These cells are critical in the function of the facility and there are only two now.

Why can’t we expand the current jail?

It has been expanded twice in the past. That helped with overcrowding but actually made the efficiency even worse. The previous expansion added a wing on the end, a long way from the control room. Trying to add holding cells would result in a complete shutdown of the facility for extended periods of time and cost almost as much as a new jail.

There are no facilities currently available that could be used for a jail. The old “prison” on chambers road has been looked at and found to be unusable. By state constitution, the Sheriff’s Office must be in the county seat. This left only a site next to the current facility and property on Cleaver Rd.

Why not fix the current jail?

The jail committee studied all aspects of renovation and determined that the extensive problems with our current facility could not be adequately remedied by renovation or expansion. Their recommendation was for the county to build a new jail.

It is not realistic to assert that the current jail could be operated much longer. The jail complies with less than half of the national minimum jail standards, largely because of the design and condition of the building.

Though our facility is “grandfathered” in with Michigan Department of Corrections standards that does not exempt us for lawsuits for violation of current standards.

What will happen to the old jail?

The old jail will be torn down except for a portion which also operates heating and cooling for the courthouse.

Will the new facility hold juveniles?

Studying the necessary costs and operation of a juvenile facility it became clear that costs would be prohibitive because of National and state standards and laws. Very few juveniles would be housed but we would still have to provide, therapists, counseling etc. that are now required. Staff in the Juvenile portion would be separate employees from the jail employees.

How many inmates are usually housed at the current jail?

Our jail population fluctuates by day, week, and month. Currently our average population is 70-80 inmates. However, these figures are directly related to the shutdown we have had to do because of Covid. Arrests have been limited to serious felonies, OWI, domestic assault etc. In the past at times, we house inmates in other jails due to overcrowding. At one point it cost the county \$250,000 in one year. A lot depends on the sentencing guidelines and court system.

From 2006-2015 the state prison population decreased by 17%, nearly 9000 inmates. During that time the jails saw an increase in population.

Will the new facility help reduce the inmate recidivism rate?

Yes! We currently do not have the space necessary to provide inmates with the tools they need to transition back into society such as education, counseling, and training. Studies and statistics show the best way to lower the jail population is to provide help and resources to inmates so they do not continuously cycle through the criminal justice system. Our courts already have drug court, sobriety court and mental health court to try and reduce jail population.

We only have one room we call the library for multiple functions including putting an arrestee in there when we can't put them in the two holding cells. Organizations like GED education, mental health counseling, alcohol and drug counseling, and other programs cannot find room to do their programs. Tuscola County has many potential volunteers who could provide education and programs to the inmates if we only had the space.

Where will the new jail be located?

The new facility would be built alongside the current jail and the current jail can be kept in operation until the new facility is built making the transition as economical as possible.

Utilizing the existing tunnel was of paramount concern for safety and security reasons.

Building a new jail on Cleaver Road would be slightly less costly than here but the long-term costs of having to transport inmates to court, adding additional jail staff and building some sort of "holding cell" in the courthouse became cost prohibitive. It would cost millions more in the long run to do this.

By state constitution a sheriff's office must be located in the county seat.

What will the new facility look like?

That will be determined if the referendum passes. The jail committee's idea would be to make it a close resemblance to the courthouse façade but that is all to be determined later. Cost will be a major factor. Modern jails are usually designed to look like any other modern school or office building. No razor wire would be visible to the public. An example of what the facility could look like was done by the Byce study and is online in their report titled "Jail feasibility study" on the front page of the county website, tuscolacounty.org.

When would the new jail be started and completed?

There are numerous variables that make it difficult to determine start and completion dates for a new facility. At the same time a construction manager will be selected through an open competitive process. An architectural firm will be selected, and most likely we will receive much interest in this project. As an example , Alpena county approved their millage in 2017 and the jail opened the fall of 2021.

How would the new jail be different from the current jail?

It will be different in just about every way.

The new facility will be designed to have single cells to ensure safety of inmates and staff. Having single cells will allow for adequate separation as determined by each inmate's needs.

There will be much need storage space which none is available now.

Updated technology will be utilized to make the operation much more efficient and safer.

Deputies and support staff will no longer have to endure sewage coming from the cells into the offices in the basement where they work. No offices will be used in a basement if it constructed.

How much more space would the new jail provide?

More important the number and types of spaces in the new facility will provide a safe, secure, and productive setting for staff and inmates.

Would the new jail require more staff to operate?

It has not definitely been determined yet as the exact architectural plan has not been drawn up. These plans cost hundreds and thousands of dollars but it is always possible to need more staff.

Can't we reduce the number of correctional staff needed by using video surveillance cameras?

Technology should not reduce the number of actual staff needed. Cameras can augment staff efforts but are limited to observing inmates, inmate supervision is face to face. Correctional officers are necessary for inmate movement and actual supervision in the event of emergency, altercations, and inmate interaction.

Does the State of Michigan have authority to tell us what to build and how to operate it?

The State of Michigan does have specific guidelines on how the jail needs to be built including the type of structure, space, and size for the number of individuals the facility can house.

The State of Michigan also has administrative rules that direct jail operations and administration.

However, we also need to address the national "core" values, such as the PREA Act.

Does the proposed new jail have the capacity to house inmates from other counties?

There might be space to accommodate other county inmates but the size of the facility was not based on renting beds to other jurisdictions. There is a possibility of housing federal inmates if we have extra beds but that cannot be guaranteed, therefore cannot be counted on as revenue. Many other counties do so though.

Have we talked with other counties about a regional solution?

Years ago, this was looked at along with a Regional 911. Based on past and current beliefs it is not feasible to accomplish. Each of the county jails is in their own state of being so to speak. We don't believe they are in a position to get rid of their jail. Logistically with counties our square miles it would be difficult to accomplish. Also as stated earlier the Sheriff's office must have an office in the county seat which means we still need space in Caro plus holding facilities etc.

How much will it cost to build and operate?

The detailed architectural program (see Byce study) provides the BASIS for accurate construction cost estimated at 44 million. Which includes moving/replacing the maintenance garage. This also covers interior costs. Two years ago, for the same size facility the cost was 36 million. The price will always go up, it will never go down. Many years ago, then Sheriff Tom Kern presented a proposal for new jail and the cost was then 10 million.

How much will it cost to build and why are jails so expensive?

Let's use the new Farmers Market built in Caro recently. It has no walls yet cost almost a million dollars. The banner going over the main road in Frankenmuth according to the news story was about 2 million. So, putting that into prospective it seems a reasonable cost as jails are inherently expensive.

The estimated cost is 44 million. It considers inflation costs. Putting off a new jail these past years has raised the cost significantly and the same will happen if we do nothing today. A jail is one of the most expensive types of building. The secure area of the facility will be constructed of reinforced concrete and or steel. Security hardware and fixtures will be required throughout. Control systems are costly as is the other technology that will be needed. Some of the hardware (i.e.. Kiosk, etc.) will be used in the new facility.

All aspects of the secure area of the facility must withstand 24-hour use by occupants who do not want to be there. Another significant cost involves the state mandates regarding space needed per inmate.

Can the project be done for less?

Cutting corners on the design and construction will provide more costly to taxpayers in the long run. Other jail builds that tried this are suffering right now to fix issues that have already came up in a new jail.

Can we get state or federal funds to assist us?

This has been researched extensively and found no assistance except for low interest loans through the USDA. Some new jails have used a combination of USDA loans and private funds.

Are there ways to offset some of the expenses of operating the new jail by assessing inmate fees?

We already do. We try to recoup taxpayers' money by billing inmates for the medical, housing booking fees etc. That revenue goes back into the general fund.

How much did the county already spend on planning and studies in the past?

\$20,000 + has been spent in the past for studies. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent on maintenance for the facility. We constantly must call maintenance to fix jail issues daily. Jail window replacement has been put off for years hoping for a new jail and not waste money on something that will come down in 4 years or so. The cost of which is in the hundreds of thousands of dollars as cellblock windows are extremely expensive to take out and replace.

How does the new building effect the County's property insurance?

It is possible that liability insurance will decline with the construction of a new facility. Safety and security will be improved such as fire suppression systems, compared to the current facility. It is believed thought that the property insurance will increase though for the new facility.

Will local contractors have a chance to bid on this project?

Yes, local contractors will have an opportunity to bid on the jail construction project. By using a construction manager, local contractors will have more opportunities to be part of the construction. The county may grant award to a qualified local bidder if the local bid is within 5% of the lowest bid meeting specifications submitted. The award may be granted to the lowest bidder for an amount equal to the lowest bid submitted by a local bidder meeting specification.

Why can't the old "prison" on Chambers Rd. be used?

It was not really a “prison” but a Reentry Facility. After it closed many years ago county commissioners toured the facility and deemed it too costly to renovate for any county purpose. No one wants that property due to the hazardous materials found there. The buildings are currently being torn down by the State.

Besides, it is located out of the county seat and a Sheriff’s Office must be located there (City of Caro) per the State Constitution. We would still need a Sheriff’s Office in Caro besides a jail outside of town making it a cost factor and security issue. More staff would be needed to constantly transport inmates to court even with video available as not all cases can be done by video and the inmate must appear in court. A holding facility would still be needed at or near the court to hold prisoners awaiting court.

Are the plans for a new facility already drawn up?

No, actual architectural plans cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. The board asked Byce and Associates to do a study and answer two questions. They produced “renderings” to show that it would fit into the existing area.

- 1) Would a jail of necessary size be able to fit along the existing facility so it could keep operating while a new facility was being built?
- 2) What would the approximate cost be for a facility that size for millage purposes?

What does the downtown development authority language mean on the ballot?

This language is required on all ballot issues. Like most counties the city of Caro has a Downtown Development Authority that is allowed to capture taxes within the boundaries of that DDA to spend on improvement within their boundaries. Those taxes can only be spent in that DDA.

What will the impact be on my tax bill?

Using an \$80,000 taxable value (\$160,000 home value), applied to the .9800 mills will cost the taxpayer \$78. for that year.

Or the other way to represent the cost would be to remember it is costing a little over .98 cents (.9829) per thousand of taxable value.

Why is it more costly than Saginaw Counties Newer Jail

Several reasons, one of time and inflation. Saginaw's was planned years ago. Remember it takes an average of 3-5 years once the approval is given to construct. Architects will then use their skills to determine the long-term cost since construction takes so long. As stated, before Alpena Counties new jail was approved in 2017 and opened in 2021 and inflation goes up at least 6% a year for construction.

Builders have also told us that labor costs are more in our rural area as they must lure workers from out of the area, thus raising labor costs. Builders have told us comparing us to Saginaw County is "like comparing apples to oranges."

What about these furnishings

If it takes approximately 4 years for construction, we do not know what furnishings are still in good shape. Certainly desks, cabinets and other office equipment can be transferred as long as its usable. Kitchen appliances, stoves refrigerators can all be incorporated in a new jail. Security cameras have a short life span so we cannot guarantee their working order in 4 or more years. It's better to plan for contingency.