Clatsop County Jail Project

Ballot Measure 4-195, placed on the Nov. 6, 2018 election ballot, was approved by Clatsop County voters. The measure authorizes a $20 million bond to be used to fund the development of a new Clatsop County Jail at the former Oregon Youth Authority juvenile detention facility in Warrenton.

Jail Project Timeline
Jail Project Photos

What is the project?

The funds will be used to develop a new 148-bed county jail at the former OYA juvenile facility to increase capacity from the 60 beds available in the existing jail in Astoria, reduce early releases of offenders and provide space to hold inmates with contagious illnesses and behavioral problems separate from the main population

The project will utilize the existing OYA facility for staff offices, intake space, food service and 20 inmate beds, while placing 128 beds in a new adjoining section offering an efficient layout *(see link to diagram below)*.

How much will the project cost?

The total estimated cost, including design, permits, construction and contingency fund, is $23.8 million. Funding will come primarily from a $20 million, 20-year general obligation bond – the remainder of the cost will be covered by surplus state timber revenue.

The tax rate for the bond will be an estimated $0.21 per $1,000 of assessed property value, equal to an estimated $53 per year for the owner of a property assessed at $250,000.

What will it cost to operate the new jail?

The new jail will cost an estimated $5,206,900 per year to operate, about 30 percent more than the current facility. The increase is reflected in an expansion of the jail staff from 31 FTE (full-time equivalent) positions to 37, as well as increases in supply and maintenance costs.

This will be offset with spending adjustments elsewhere, with the result that the Sheriff’s Office entire annual corrections budget will see an estimated net increase of $685,000. Of this amount, about $420,000 will be covered by an increase in the county’s transient room tax. The remaining $265,000 will be paid for from the county’s General Fund.

As a comparison, the current county jail has a total operating cost equal to $174 per bed per day. The operating cost of the proposed 148-bed jail is estimated to be $96 per bed per day.

What is the jail's current capacity?

The Clatsop County Jail in downtown Astoria, first opened in 1980, currently operates at a 60-inmate capacity. By law the county can exceed the 60-inmate cap, but only for up to 96 hours. At times the population of the jail has reached 74 – the extra inmates are temporarily accommodated with portable beds placed on the floor, creating an unsafe environment for corrections deputies and inmates alike.

The Clatsop County Sheriff's Office is one of few counties to implement a pretrial release program. The program uses actuarial risk assessment tools and interviews to determine a defendant's relative likelihood of not committing new crimes between arrest and case adjudication and the likelihood the defendant will appear in court. This program keeps low level offenders and those likely to comply with release requirements out of jail from the beginning.

Despite this program, 18.9% of bookings end in a forced release from jail. During the first six months of 2018, 236 people determined by pretrial staff as not being ideal candidates for release were released. With the current number of beds available, the Sheriff's Office releases both pretrial defendants and convicted offenders before the end of their sentences due to lack of space – in June of 2018, more than 50 inmates were released early, some twice, or with Department of Corrections prison sentences pending.

People on parole or probation who commit violations of the terms of their supervision that would warrant jail sentences are not always incarcerated because no beds are available at the jail to hold them. Usually they must "day report" or check in with a probation officer once a day in lieu of time in jail for violations of the terms of supervision.

The Clatsop County Sheriff's Office currently has more than 1,500 outstanding arrest warrants on file. Each month the Sheriff's Office serves an average of 87 warrants; of those, about seven result in a person serving the full required time in custody. The rest are released early or cited and released in the field due to housing limitations in the jail. Weekly, people are arrested in other counties on Clatsop County warrants and are released with a court date and time because they cannot be held if transported to our jail. When the defendant fails to appear in court, a new warrant is issued and the cycle continues.

In 2018, 56% of bookings into Clatsop County Jail resulted in a stay of less than one day in custody. Those who have been released from the jail prior to trial or before the end of their sentences due to housing limitations include people convicted of domestic violence assaults, strangulation, robbery and motor vehicle theft. Part of this is attributed to the fact approximately half of Clatsop County's inmates are charged with serious Measure 11 offenses,

which include charges ranging from murder to rape, sex abuse and sodomy, to assaults involving dangerous or deadly weapons. This means there are limited options regarding holding or imposing the sentences of defendants charged with crimes such as burglary, trespassing or theft.

The 148-bed capacity of the new facility is designed to provide space for sentenced offenders to serve their full terms, with additional beds for parole and probation violators and people arrested on warrants.

What else will the proposed jail offer?

The size and configuration of the existing county jail limits the ability of staff to separate the population based on gender, criminal classification and other factors, as well as to isolate inmates with contagious illnesses, mental health issues or behavioral problems. At times, the need to isolate certain inmates for security reasons means that the total population is held below the 60-inmate maximum.

Since the jail opened in 1980, the average number of female inmates has increased from 1 or 2 to approximately 25 percent of the total population. Male and female inmates must be held separately in the facility.

The new jail will offer additional beds for all classifications of inmates. It will also provide space for treatment programs and other services that the current facility does not have space to house.

Are there alternative programs?

Clatsop County and our local circuit courts operate several programs designed to provide an alternative to incarceration for local offenders, including Drug Court and Mental Health Court. Plus, Sheriff’s Office Parole and Probation supervises 419 people.

The Sheriff’s Office has also instituted an inmate work crew program, electronic monitoring (home arrest) and day reporting as jail alternatives, in part due to the jail’s space limitations.

Alternative programs like Drug Court are designed to help people break the cycle of substance abuse and other behaviors that frequently contribute to criminal activity, by offering the chance to clear a criminal charge off their record in return for successfully completing a treatment program. Due to the capacity of the current facility, there are limited options to sanction program participants if they fail to abide by the programs’ conditions.

Would renting jail beds elsewhere be an option?

In past years the county has rented up to 18 beds in the Tillamook County Jail. In 2017 that arrangement ended because Tillamook County no longer had the available number of surplus

beds agreed to in the contract with Clatsop County.

The cost to rent beds in other counties is $103.96 per bed per day. Renting 88 beds – the number that would be added with the proposed new jail project – would cost more than $3.4 million a year on top of the operating cost of the current jail. This cost would exceed both the increased operating cost and the annual cost of construction of the proposed new jail. The Sheriff's Office would not be able to obtain that number of beds from a single facility and would have to rent beds from multiple jails throughout Oregon.

The rental charge does not include additional transportation and other costs associated with housing offenders outside the county. The most likely option is renting 30 additional beds at an annual cost of $1.14 million a year, which would fall well below the number of beds the Sheriff's Office believes is needed to alleviate the challenges faced by our Criminal Justice system in Clatsop County.

Why is the OYA facility the proposed site?

In early 2017 the State of Oregon informed county officials of the pending closure of the Oregon Youth Authority's North Coast Youth Correctional Facility later in the year, and indicated that the site could be transferred to the county. The county contracted with the DLR Group architectural firm to examine the feasibility of converting the site to a county jail and to draw up alternative plans.

The Board of Commissioners reviewed the resulting options and in February 2018 settled on a proposed plan for a 148-bed jail. This plan will:

- Utilize a portion of the existing OYA facility to house staff offices, intake space, food service and 20 jail beds.
- Locate 128 beds in a new section to be constructed in the building's open courtyard.

This project will allow for the re-use of a substantial portion of the existing building, while placing the majority of beds in a modern, efficient layout that requires a minimum amount of staffing to monitor. Reuse of the existing facilities will allow the county to open a 148-bed jail for about half the cost of building a new facility from scratch.

The new jail facility will also be in close proximity to the Sheriff's Office headquarters and Parole and Probation office located nearby. The more central location will provide easier access and more convenience to south-county law enforcement agencies. Finally, the OYA facility isn't in or immediately adjacent to the tsunami inundation zone or other geo-hazards.

Supporting Documents

Jail Bond Quick Facts(241.88 KB)

Jail Project - Next Steps(187.25 KB)

Jail Project Subcontractor List(90.69 KB)

Jail Bond Update Report - January 2020(1.35 MB)

Jail Demo Plan - Overall(977.55 KB)

Jail Construction Update - March 2021(2.21 MB)

Jail Diagram(1.78 MB)