

JPTF Final Recommendation on Size of the New Jail

The Whatcom County Jail Planning Task Force (JPTF) has determined that there is a critical need for new Jail facilities and that the size and number of beds is a complex issue. The number of beds needed in Whatcom County's new jail will be dependent on numerous factors, including but not limited to: general demographic trends, available alternatives to incarceration, diversion programs, efficiencies in the courts, capital budget, operating budget, judicial and legislative mandates, and the need to remain at approximately 80% - 85% capacity to accommodate shifting populations. Each jail bed is very expensive to construct. Accurately predicting the number of beds needed is therefore critically important in the jail construction process. It is important that the final number of beds planned for construction is not selected arbitrarily, but is instead based on information specific to Whatcom County's needs and budget.

Based on information gathered to date, the JPTF has determined that it is reasonable to estimate that the number of beds required for initial construction should be in the range of 500-700. We are also well aware that common facilities such as the kitchen, laundry, property storage, etc. should be designed and constructed to accommodate future growth and that construction should be planned to make future expansion cost-effective. The exact number and type of beds, needs to be determined in association with a professional Jail Planner, as outlined in the JPTF's December 6, 2011 recommendation to County Council.