

## **Whatcom County Jail Planning Task Force Final Report and Recommendations**

### **Summary**

---

The JPTF has agreed on a need for a new jail. We also unanimously recommended that the county retain an experienced jail planner. This 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.)

Feedback has been provided on site criteria, the basic components needed in a jail and a recommendation on the size of the facility. We have also come to consensus on the importance of continuing to provide alternative programs within the jail and options to full incarceration for appropriate offenders. These are proven, cost-effective programs that lead to behavioral changes, make it less likely that the individual will re-offend and lower the overall costs to the community.

We encourage the Whatcom County Council to move forward on a new jail. Our task force agrees that in order to provide safe and cost-effective criminal justice solutions for our community, we urgently need a new jail, improvements to programming and alternatives to incarceration.

Please see attached Appendix for specific recommendations.

### **Overview**

---

On April 26, 2011, the Whatcom County Council approved a resolution to establish a Jail Planning Task Force to study and issue a final report that addresses:

- The recommended size of the new jail, including recommendations for future expansion should that be needed
- The recommended location(s) of the new jail for further analysis
- Recommendations (if any) related to a mental health triage center to divert the mentally ill into more effective and efficient treatment
- Recommendations (if any) related to efficiencies in the new jail to reduce the overall operating costs
- Recommended strategies for funding the construction of the new jail.

The Jail Planning Task Force was appointed by then County Executive Pete Kremen and began to meet in late June. The Task Force consists of the following citizens and staff members:

- Ray Baribeau
- Doralee Booth
- David Christensen
- Peter Dawson

- Peter Dworkin, Chair
- Lisa McShane, Vice-Chair
- Barbara Sternberger
- John Wilson
- Erik Ramstead, Everson Police Chief, representing the Police Chief's Association
- Wendy Jones, Jail Chief, representing the Sheriff's office
- Caleb Erickson, Corrections Deputy, representing Whatcom County Sheriff's Office Corrections Deputies
- Marianne Caldwell, representing the County Executive
- Anne Deacon, representing Mental Health Services

Over the past 10 months the Jail Planning Task Force met 16 times. Kathy Mohebbi was retained to provide assistance to the Task Force, including the preparation of detailed minutes of all meetings. Many of the members attended a tour of the Snohomish County Jail to see a recent project. Those who had not seen the Whatcom County Jails toured the two facilities. The Task Force brought a nationally recognized jail planner, Jay Farbstein, to Whatcom County to recommend a process we should use to build the jail. The process he recommended was one routinely followed by other jurisdictions across the nation. In addition, we received a presentation from a team from the National Institute of Corrections on the status of the current facilities and their recommendations.

Data that many of us read and used to inform our work can be found on the Whatcom County website:

<http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/jailsiting/background.jsp>

Public involvement in planning for a new jail is critical and the JPTF was specifically mandated to implement public participation measures. As a result, the JPTF established a set of procedures ensuring that our meetings and information are open to the public. Specifically we established:

- A time for the public to speak at our meetings
- A system of placing all our information, including the agenda, minutes and all background information online. The link to our page can currently be found on Whatcom County's home page
- An email box where all of our emails can be found, and easily obtained by the public.

In addition, to facilitate public information, public presentations were made by both Dr. Farbstein and the National Institute of Corrections on their findings.

During these past ten months we discussed and considered the following issues related to the new jail:

- Financing and the overall cost of construction
- Operating costs of a new jail
- Conditions in the current jail
- How average length of stay is determined and what impacts that critical number
- Adult Probation
- Drug Court

- Mental Health Treatment, including the existing Triage Center
- Offender Re-entry Services
- Current programs in the jail
- Current jail alternatives including electronic home detention, work/school release, in-custody work crews, out-of-custody work crews to pay fines.
- Components of a new jail
- A report from the National Institute of Corrections
- Optimum size of a new jail
- Criteria to be used in locating a new jail
- Process of planning a new jail

Many of the meetings where the above issues were discussed and addressed included presentations by community stakeholders, such as Bruce VanGlubt, District Court and Probation Administrator; Hon. Charles R. Snyder, Whatcom County Superior Court Presiding Judge and Drug Court Judge; Dewey Desler, then Whatcom County Deputy Administrator, and Anne Deacon, Whatcom County Health Department.

We made a preliminary recommendation to the County Council in December of 2011, which is found in the Appendix, and have created a series of additional recommendations to the Whatcom County Council, the complete versions of which will follow this introduction. Those recommendations are:

1. Recommendation to build a new jail
2. Components of a new jail
3. Size of jail
4. Criteria for locating a new jail

In addition, the Mental Health Triage Facility is part of the Jail Planning Task Force charge and we recognize this is important. While we restricted ourselves to the jail for the purposes of moving a new jail forward, we recommend that space be found for a Mental Health Triage Facility with sufficient capacity and capability to offer pre-booking diversion from jail.

The JPTF has also determined that some of the items included in the Council resolution are beyond the ability of the task force to address, and will be more appropriately addressed by experts in the field of jail planning. We agree with Jay Farbstein's statement:

“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.”

Several of the tasks the JPTF was charged to do in 6 months were beyond our expertise and should be accomplished in conjunction with the jail planner and real estate professional. Those include:

1. Funding options for the new jail,
2. Operational costs for the new jail, how operation will be funded and efficiencies in the new jail to reduce the overall operating costs
3. Specific location options for a new jail.
4. The impact of design on capital and operational costs

### **Appendix**

- Recommendation #1: **The need for a new jail facility in Whatcom County.**
- Recommendation #2: **Components of a new jail**
- Recommendation #3: Recommendations to the County Council - **retain a professional jail planner, continue the jail planning task force, re-establish the Law & Justice Council.**
- **Report by Jay Farbstein** (included in Recommendation #3)
- Recommendation #4: **Size of the new jail**
- Recommendation #5: **Criteria for locating a new jail**