

Frequently Asked Questions - Dickinson County Jail Project

Why are we paying \$10 million to expand the county jail? The estimate of \$10 million is not to expand the existing jail but to build a new jail. The existing jail, which was built in 1956 was built in a linear design, which is long and narrow, and is not ADA accessible nor is it able to be made that way. It also does not have the ability to separate inmates by different classifications. It was built in an era where few if any inmates were held for serious crimes, few if any females were ever held, and it was designed to be operated by only one jailer. Over the years jail designers have learned that the safest and more efficient way to build these facilities is in a "[Podular](#)" design that allows for one jailer to see and monitor all the inmates simultaneously, whereby preventing the cost of multiple staff members being required to monitor the inmates. Minimizing the number of staff that it takes to run the facility is a huge cost savings, and cannot be done with the current facility. Having the ability to separate different types of offenders also prevents issues among the inmates that otherwise result in injuries and problems with the inmates. If an inmate is injured while in jail, the cost of the medical care is the responsibility of the county, and can get rather expensive. These are but a few of the reasons why the existing jail is no longer sufficient for holding county inmates.

So why so expensive? All construction is expensive, but jail construction is even more expensive due to the nature of the construction. Three years ago this project would have cost \$13 million. At about 6% per year increase for construction costs, the project is now estimated to be \$15 million. A year from now those costs will increase another 6%, so delays in the project simply allow for increased costs. The design and manner by which this is proposed will be done in one of the least expensive methods of construction, however it still needs to be done to the quality that it serves the purpose and will last for 50 plus years.

Why should I have to pay for this project? A county jail is the property of the people. It is the first line of defense in detaining those people that are deemed too dangerous to be out in public in our society. Whether it's the worst terrorist or the habitual speeder, every person arrested in our nation is first taken to a local jail, therefore they need to have the ability to detail the worst criminals. As a county it is our responsibility to operate our jail in the safest and securest way

we can, and it is the responsibility of the local taxpayers to foot the bill for that service.

Why has this come up now and why do we need to do this? This is not a new problem. In the early 1990's, then Sheriff Carl McDonald publically stated there are issues with our jail and the courthouse. In the mid 2000's Sheriff Curt Bennet also stated there were problems with the jail then, and even did a minor retrofit to the front office and booking areas to make them safer. Nothing was done to the main cell block or to address the issues of inmates going to and from court in the public hallway because there was nothing that could be done. Now Sheriff Hoffman is indicating the same problems persist. The current jail has a capacity of 38 beds and has been running at full capacity for years. The courthouse and jail are 62 years old and have plumbing, HVAC, and electrical issues, and the original windows do not seal and are very inefficient making utility and [maintenance](#) costs high. The most critical is that the location of the jail in respect to the courtroom is such that [inmates](#) have to walk down the public corridor to get from jail to court and back. Very dangerous and unsafe to the employees, public and inmates.

What are the electrical and plumbing issues? Electrical problems include not enough outlets and circuits that are over loaded and blowing [breakers](#) frequently. Water line leaks in the ceilings due to aged pipes, and sewer lines that are rotted causing the ongoing odor of sewer gas in the building, which at certain levels can be hazardous to the employees. These pipes are 62 years old and are deteriorated. The pipes run inside the walls and are difficult to remove and replace without doing major demolition to access them.

Why can't we just renovate and get by with what we have? The current jail design is not ADA or [PREA](#) (federal standards for jails) compliant and cannot be made so. Its size and linear design simply prevent it from being capable of being updated to meet the needs of today so renovation of the existing jail is simply not an option.

What are the problems with the current jail? Safety and security issues in the existing jail include 62 year old cell doors with bad lock mechanisms, jail doors that will not lock, door's that will not activate properly. The linear design prevents staff from being able to monitor activity in the cells and open areas of the jail. All of above expose the jail staff to unnecessarily risks and danger's they should not be subjected to.

If taking inmates down the hallway is so risky, why can't you take them a different route to court? Due to the design of the building, there is no other way to get [inmates](#) from the Jail to the larger courtroom without going down the public hallway. Also, the judges must walk through the public hallway to get to their bench for court, all of which is dangerous. There is currently no other way to get there.

Why is it dangerous for Judges to walk in the hallway? By the nature of the work, Judges are required to make decisions about people's freedoms, their families, and their children that are not always popular and being forced to walk through the very people that they just dealt with can be very dangerous to the safety and wellbeing of them and their staff members.

Have you checked into just building a whole new facility and not wasting money on the old courthouse? Yes. Building a totally new facility would be cost prohibitive and we as a county simply could not afford that cost. The current courthouse structure is very solid and just needs to have some minor updates to make it usable and efficient for the next 50+ years. The county already owns the property where the new addition will be placed and therefore connecting to the existing courthouse to have secure access to the courtrooms, the County Attorney's office, and the District Court just make good sense to accomplish the safety goals.

What about building a separate jail at another location, has this been looked at?

Yes, the option of a new facility was discussed, however one of the main goals here is to prevent the inmates from leaving the jail to go to court and back. If the jail was at a different location, the inmates would have to be transported out of the secure jail, to court and then back, all causing the risk of escape or worse. These risks are eliminated by having the jail connected to the courthouse, and having secure corridors to take the prisoners to and from court. There are also many other benefits to having the facilities together such as computer and phone services and sharing computer networks, backup power systems, phone systems, and staff to maintain them. Having the jail and the Sheriff's Dept at the same location is critical for management and operations.

What would you do with the space where the jail is currently? Once the new jail is built ([phase 1](#)) and the inmates are then able to be moved into the new jail, the old jail would be removed. A new courtroom would then be constructed in this area ([phase 2](#)) that would be larger than the current [smaller courtroom](#). The area along the south side of the second floor would then become the District Court offices. Once the District Court is moved into that area, the County Attorney's office would be moved into the west end of the courthouse, and their old building would be removed. Removing their old building would eliminate roughly \$15,000 in maintenance and utility costs per year that are currently being paid. As the upper floor is completed then the rest of the courthouse would be renovated to remove and replace the current windows with energy efficient windows, new lighting and all plumbing and heating/cooling systems that all would operate much more efficiently. This efficiency/savings along with the reduction in maintenance costs currently required would result in roughly [\\$78,000](#) per year in savings.

Why is the new jail so big? Can't it be sized down some to save some money?

Research over the past 20 years tells us what the daily population of the jail typically has been. Over the past few years we have seen an increase in female and special needs inmates that are cause for more segregation. During the months of May through June, 2018, the daily population has been 32 to 34 inmates, with 6 to 8 of those being female. [Experts](#) tell us that a 60 bed facility will provide us the space we will need in the future, and provide the ability to segregate and manage the population adequately. It is much easier to build for the future and have the space then build for today, than need more space in a few years and not have it, and be right back to the same situation we are in now.

Have other alternatives to incarceration been explored for those non-dangerous individuals who are waiting for trial?

Yes. Dickinson County currently participates in a supervised release bond program where persons are able to be released pending their trial or court appearance if they are willing to participate in the supervised bond program. That program requires the inmate to report weekly to a court services officer for a drug test, as well as other requirements that monitor their ability to refrain from getting into trouble. During the month of April, 2018, Dickinson County had over 60 persons that were out on supervised bond release. Without this program they would have been required to bond out of jail or would be in jail waiting for their court date. If it were not for this program, our county jail would certainly be full and have another 40 to 50 inmates under our control and cost being housed under contract at other jails, all at the cost to our taxpayers.

Why are the costs estimates so high? There must be less expensive options?

By the nature of the design, jails are expensive to build. They are much more complex than a normal building. They have to be tough enough and designed to keep the worst members of our society inside, while we are safe outside. The costs are high because of all the metal cells, electronic controls and monitors and spaces that are needed to make them safe for the inmates and the staff. The federal government through the Prison Rape Elimination Act ([PREA](#)) of 2013 spell out what the minimal requirements are for jail construction. Options of other sites, other buildings, and many options were all discussed and considered over the past several years. Building on the current site, using the designs that are in place was the most cost effective and efficient long term solution.

Why the rush now? Two things are for certain. We will always have a need for a court system in our society and will always have a need for a county jail. The problems described above are not going away. A big part of any cost for a project like this is the cost of borrowing the money to do it. [Interest](#) rates for municipal bonds have been at historical lows over the past few years, and are slowly starting to rise. Interest rates are not an exact science, so nobody knows for sure what they will do, but one can reasonably expect them to continue to increase in the future.

Getting these low [interest](#) rates locked in on this project now would save the county taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars if not millions of dollars over the life of this project. Therefore, time is critical if we want to take advantage of the low interest rates.

So just how much effect do the interest rates have on the cost of this project?

½ of a percent raise in interest on \$15 million equates to an increase of \$60,000 per year on the bond payment, or millions of dollars in increased cost over the life of a 25 year bond

Do we have to borrow all the money to pay for this project? No, the county recognized these issues many years ago and implemented a 2 mill tax in 2013 for this project. Since that time, that tax has generated about \$2 million in funds that can be used towards the project, requiring us to only need to borrow \$13 million. The payment for the bonds will come from the taxes that are already in place and have been in place for years now. A [summary](#) sheet showing where the funds will come from to pay for the bonds can be found here.

So if this is approved, how much will my taxes increase to pay for it? With the moneys that are already in the budget for this project, and some funds that will be received from other sources that are coming off exempt status in the next year or so, we are very comfortable knowing we can make the bond payments for this project at today's prices, **with no tax** increase to the taxpayers as a result of this project. That certainly does not mean other issues outside of this project will not cause increases in the future, but once these interest rates are locked in, our bond payments will be the same for the life of the bonds and will not increase.

I find it hard to believe my taxes won't increase? We know we can repay the bonds for this on what we have today for revenue sources. That certainly does not cover any future increases in costs for other things like roads and bridges, ambulance services, 911 costs, Sheriff's functions, costs for Health services, etc. Any or all of these may increase in the future resulting in tax increases or decreases. The only thing for sure is that locking in the cost of the jail project will allow for a set dollar amount each year that would not increase over the life of the bonds.

Over the past decade our population has decreased and crime has decreased nationally according to several sources. Why have our jail numbers increased?

Population does not necessarily dictate what crime rates will be. Over the past decade our law enforcement agencies have seen a steady increase in both calls

for service as well as crimes, which result in more cases being handled by the County Attorney's office and by the District Court. Many of these cases involve sex related offenses with children and most all have some connection to illegal drugs. All of the above result in more people being prosecuted and more individuals being held in the county jail. At the same time, the Kansas Department of Corrections have relied on county jails to hold many of the people that have been sentenced to state prisons for longer periods of time before they are taken into KDOC custody and transported to a state facility. This is caused by in large to the fact that the state prison facilities are full and have no room.