



## Franklin County Jail Subcommittee Summary Report

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Franklin County, Ga, is currently exploring options for how to address several concerns raised regarding their existing jail. The structure is currently operating at capacity, with the County having to contract with neighboring facilities to house overflow inmates. In addition the current facility is dealing with several issues stemming from natural aging as well as evolving operational needs that are not ideally suited by the current design. Some of these issues have been raised in the past but the County has not yet taken comprehensive action to resolve them, largely due to financial reasons.

In the spring of 2017 it was conceived that the County should convene a subcommittee to formally explore the matter and come up with recommendations for the County Commission. This subcommittee would review the details of the jail facility and the general background that lead to this point, and then identify and assess options for securing a best solution for Franklin County, its Sheriff's Department, the inmates, and the taxpayers.

After 3 meetings in which materials were reviewed and various stakeholders provided their insight, the majority of the subcommittee was able to agree on various elements that defined the level of need for the existing facility and that an expansion at the current site coupled with improvements to the existing facility would be the best course of action at this point in time. This majority recommendation acknowledges the financial realities of the County at this time and does not seek to undermine other priorities or needs throughout Franklin County. Rather, it focuses on the needs and projected demands for the jail as a facility and identifies what should be the most cost-effective approach to providing a functional facility that meets performance expectations for all involved.

These majority recommendations are presented herein as a guide for the County Commission in considering the need for action on behalf of the Franklin County Sheriff's Department and all those with a stake in the functional operation of the Franklin County Jail.

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## FRANKLIN COUNTY JAIL SUBCOMMITTEE

**Goal:** *Provide guidance to the County Commission on the best course of action for the immediate and future jail needs of Franklin County.*

### Meeting Structure

<i>Meeting 1</i>	June 13, 2017	Carnesville Community Center	7 PM
<i>Meeting 2</i>	June 20, 2017	Carnesville Community Center	7 PM
<i>Meeting 3</i>	August 3, 2017	Carnesville Community Center	7 PM

*Meeting 1* featured speakers from the Sheriff's Department to provide an overview of jail operations and of the conditions for the jail facility itself. Materials were provided to the Subcommittee members highlighting financial and functional information about jail operations. The County Manager also provided an overview of the general County budget and financial options for capital projects within the County. This session was done to ensure all the subcommittee members had a clear understanding of the facts involved and could better assess options for the future. During this meeting the subcommittee agreed:

- *Everyone wants a safe and functional jail*
- *No one wants to adversely hurt the taxpayers*
- *Past actions/inaction led us here*

*Meeting 2* began the assessment of options, specifically in weighing the costs and benefits of expansion, improving the current facility, or building a new jail altogether. This discussion explored the scope of work needed to ensure optimal functional performance, including assurances that the site could handle expansion, that any expansion would meet the needs for an extended time, and ways the Department could ensure that in the future the jail would not be overtaxed as seen today. Consultants presented the subcommittee with information about jail design and construction costs, including the projected costs for one expansion currently proposed for the County and the possible costs for a new facility elsewhere in the County. By conclusion of this meeting the majority of the Subcommittee agreed that an expansion coupled with improvements to the existing facility would be the most cost-effective solution for Franklin County at this time.

*Meeting 3* ratified the recommendation agreed from Meeting 2 and moved on to discuss what else should be done to ensure that a) this project could be feasibly and politically achieved and b) what other measures should be done to ensure the optimal performance of the jail in the future. This meant reviewing some of the procedural measures the County and other stakeholders should pursue to see an expansion effort through to completion and not left unfulfilled. It also meant reviewing existing policies to ensure that the Sheriff's Department could regularly monitor the operational and financial performance of the jail to stay ahead of any demands for future capital improvement projects. (ie: further expansions, facility upgrade, etc.) This was agreed that the County should adopt more effective long-range planning and budgeting so that major facility and utility investments can be more predictable, addressed in a timely and thoughtful manner, and be done with an emphasis on fiscal responsibility.

*(Copies of meeting minutes are available through the County Manager's office.)*

## WHAT WAS LEARNED / AFFIRMED

### 1) The existing jail facility is insufficient

- The current Franklin County Jail *does not have sufficient capacity* to house all of the County's inmates, forcing the County to house prisoners off-site at cost to other facilities.
- The *size and design of the facility has led to current functional deficiencies*, where by the grouping of inmates by classification and gender complicates the operations and use of space for both inmates and staff.
- The *age and maintenance record of the facility has led to certain structural deficiencies*, with a need for improvements/repairs to be made in areas such as the kitchen, ventilation, and security cameras. Such measures must be addressed either through upgrades at the current facility or by building something new.
- Projections of *capacity needs are expecting growth in inmate traffic* for Franklin County. regardless of methodology, as the region and I-85 corridor grows it can be expected that Franklin County will see an increase in the volume of inmates handled by the Sheriff's Department, mandating that additional jail space is needed in the future.

### 2) The issues with the jail have been raised before but not fully addressed

- Previous Grand Juries and past reports from the Sheriff's Department and the County Commission have identified a need to expand and/or improve the jail facility
- Previous funds set aside for jail expansion have been redirected to maintenance of the existing facility

### 3) Franklin County currently lacks funding resources to cover expansion

- The County *lacks the immediate reserves or revenues to pay for an expansion* or new build through General Funds.
- *Any recommendation must be mindful of the impacts on both one-time and annual expenses*, including the costs associated with any move/relocation of personnel, equipment and inmates, as well as the costs of new staff to man a facility expansion
- The County should look to *amending budgeting policy to encourage dedicated funding sources for future facility improvements* and capital projects, as well as having the costs for the jail maintained as an independent subset of the Sheriff's Department budget.

## WHAT CAN BE DONE

All options were originally presented before the subcommittee to ensure that anything of reasonable solution would be considered:

- Replacement/New (larger) Jail
- Expansion - (Options for 4 pods and 2 pods)
- Renovation - (Update tech, infrastructure, etc.)
- Expansion + Renovation
- New Regional Facility
- Do Nothing

In short order it was agreed that *Do Nothing* was not a viable option. As confirmed earlier, the existing facility and conditions are considered insufficient and untenable.

The concept of a *Regional Facility* was also dismissed for both practical and political purposes. Even if the logistics behind this proposal could be realized for something as complex as a jail, by the time an accord could be reached among other regional partners the needs in Franklin County would have grown more severe. Further, this ran the risk of seeing Franklin County's needs and concerns compromised as part of a larger operation. While an option for some communities or in the future, this failed to address the immediate and near-term needs for Franklin County.

This reduced the assessment to one of exploring *Expansion* versus building a *New Jail*. The crux of this discussion focused on the foremost parameters to consider – Cost and time.

An *Expansion* has been considered in the recent past (2-3 years) to the point where the County Commission had spoken with an architect to determine if the site of the existing jail was suitable for accommodating an expansion, and if so how large could that expansion go. Logistically it appeared possible to accommodate a near 500 bed facility on the site, though for the near to mid-term the projected needs in Franklin County fall within the 200-300 bed range. What's more, this preliminary work determined that the existing jail has some ancillary facilities which could support the expansion, meaning any additions could concentrate on residential space while common areas like kitchens and medical facilities could remain housed in the current jail. However the effort was deferred indefinitely due to increasing cost estimates and budgetary overruns within the Sheriff's Department.

Based on this information and as currently proposed, an expansion would introduce 4 residential pods attached to the current facility, adding 96 beds to the 72 currently available. This would sufficiently address current overflow rates (Franklin County is currently responsible for about 90 inmates) with enough excess capacity to better accommodate prisoners with different classifications that should be ideally separated. (ie: High-risk prisoners should be kept apart from low-risk inmates.) At more than 160 beds, the immediately proposed expansion scenario provides a capacity that should take the jail into the 2030's, depending on future incarceration trends. Projected costs for this addition would be about \$3 - 4M dollars.

The optimal scenario for accommodating an expansion would also find the existing jail receiving additional improvements/upgrades, many of which would be needed, regardless, and must be done either to the existing facility or be considered in a new construction. These expenses could, then, be



considered an obligation for either scenario. Currently the Sheriff’s Department staff have identified approximately \$175,000+ worth of one-time expenses that should be pursued to ensure the facility has no functional or structural defects, thus ensuring the safety of inmates and staff. This includes, but is not limited to, items such as the following:

- |                  |                    |                      |
|------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Security cameras | Protective awnings | Kitchen improvements |
| Glass tinting    | Control panels     | Replacing door locks |

Additional projects should be added to this list as the Sheriff’s Department completes a formal assessment of the facility in preparation for a potential renovation effort. These things would be done to extend the life and the carrying capacity of the facility so as to accommodate an additional 96 inmates and provide a safer setting for staff and inmates. As was repeatedly addressed during the subcommittee meetings, this latter point was viewed by some as a measure of protecting the County against legal challenges should an inmate or County employee be injured on site. Completion of these action items in conjunction with any expansion, however, would ensure the jail is fully functional, more secure, has a longer lifespan and more energy efficient.

Building a *New Jail* would likewise accommodate a larger inmate capacity but would also necessitate finding and acquiring new land. The money that would be projected toward fixing the current facility would still be obligated through including all the ancillary service space within a wholly new jail. Recently completed projects within the state have typically exceeded \$12M:

<u>Facility</u>	<u># of beds</u>	<u>Est. Cost</u>	<u>Year Built</u>
Washington County	229	\$16M	2015
Athens-Clarke County	400	\$73M	2015
Glynn County	612	\$23M	2014
Stephens County	200	\$12M	2008

Projections for Franklin County suggest a new facility should be designed for approximately 200-400 inmates, and that the costs of the project would exceed \$15M and possibly come into the \$20M range depending on land and utility improvement costs. While such an investment might provide space for inmates farther out into the future, the costs would be significantly greater than an expansion and could impact the County’s ability to pursue other projects.

In a related note on financing, it was offered that with a larger facility Franklin County could begin housing inmates from other communities in much the way others are doing for Franklin today, yielding a minor source of revenue. This would be a factor for both an expansion or a new build, however it is cautioned that the demand in the region is currently marginal and may not prove consistent, so any revenue garnered from such efforts should be considered as supplementary and not regarded as a dependable revenue source. Such revenue may also be insufficient to cover the costs of housing such inmates.

In reviewing this information the Subcommittee agreed that the optimal solution at this time appeared to be an expansion and upgrade of the existing facility, coupled with the commencement of a long-term planning process that would establish once and for all the eventual capacity needs based on future population thresholds.

**WHAT THE MAJORITY OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE AGREED**

### **EXPANSION IS A PRIORITY**

- Building *a new facility would be expensive*, estimated at \$7-12M+ to achieve comparable size and capacity.
- Selecting and acquiring suitable *land for a new site could prove expensive, politically difficult, and take time*. It may also need significant utility and infrastructure improvements to be considered viable.
- The County cannot wait too long as *there is a need for additional space today*, which impacts both operational costs and presents safety risks for those in the facility.
- There may be *potential cost savings if acted upon quickly*, in avoiding both new permit standards set to take effect in 2018 and expected increase in construction costs in the future. The veracity and scope of any savings must still be verified.

There is a definitive need for upgrading the County's jail facilities, for both immediate and long-term needs. Failure to act in short order *could* present several safety risks to the inmates and Department personnel, and risk certain cost-savings opportunities available under present permitting codes and construction prices. If the County were to defer for something new it would not only lose time in the search for a suitable site but would also have to incur land costs and possibly pay for utility improvements, as well. Compared to options that enable the County to pursue construction as early as 2018 the option for viable expansion is considered the most viable course of action at this point.

There is an additional cost/savings factor that requires further research and confirmation. If the County moves forward with applying for and securing the State permit by the end of 2017, the County will have the option of constructing the facility under one set of federal requirements. It is possible that beginning in 2018 those requirements will change environmental performance standards that may yield a construction cost increase of 10-20% due to different design specifications and materials. Should the County opt to meet the new requirements it is expected the facility could see some cost savings in decreases in long-term utility demand/expenses.

### **EXISTING JAIL FACILITY NEEDS UPGRADE**

- In order *to optimally function as a modern jail, the structure must see a series of repairs and modifications*. A variety of features about the existing facility have either begun to succumb to age or have not been designed to meet modern performance standards while at full capacity.
- The *existing structure was designed with the potential to serve larger capacity* and greatly extend life of the building. With proper modifications the common service areas of the facility could work as such for the larger overall capacity.
- *Failure to address the current jail's needs may impair effectiveness of any expansion and risk the safety of those within*. For obvious reasons jails have defined standards for common service areas, providing for the safety of inmates and detention staff alike. The current facility is at risk of failing these standards at current capacity alone and must be addressed regardless of expansion.

### **ADOPT POLICY CHANGES REQUIRED TO AVOID PAST MISTAKES**

- The *jail budget should be shown independent* of other Sheriff's Department operations, so as to easily monitor performance and needs.
- The *Department should have dedicated funding for facility maintenance* as well as for reserves and/or long-term expansion. These may not be from new funding sources but the budget should demonstrate the routine and projected costs necessary to sustain the quality of the facility so as to properly plan for any future capital expenses.

### **SECURING FUNDING IS POSSIBLE BUT WILL REQUIRE STRONG POLITICAL WILL**

- *There will need to be a voter referendum*. Potentially as early as May, the County will need to work with the State and voters to provide the opportunity for a public vote on the matter and to ensure such process goes through as smoothly as possible.
- A *potential bond for the jail should be sold on needs* and demonstrate the cost effectiveness versus a new facility. The need for a larger capacity and to ensure the safety of residents and Sheriff's personnel is clear and paramount, which is something to which everyone on the subcommittee agreed.
- *The prospects for the jail should not be connected to closely to other financial burdens*. With proper accounting and a clear demonstration of how the County is addressing this measure differently, there should be little connection between this bond referendum and the recent hospital measure, plus it would demonstrate how the County is working to ensure the new facility maximizes the investment in the current jail and addresses that facility's issue.

### **WHAT MUST BE DONE**

## **Sheriff's Department**

- Develop the specs, work scope and terms for expansion/upgrade RFP
  - Create detailed list & projected costs for needed upgrades at existing facility
  - Develop the work scope and specifications for the proposed expansion
- Formally separate jail within departmental budget
  - Demonstrate all costs related exclusively to operating facility
  - Identify and project costs for jail maintenance and future improvements
  - Create dedicated line-item in the budget for maintenance
- Begin long-range planning process for future jail needs
  - Identify capacity thresholds for expanded facility
  - Identify targeted thresholds for when development of new/expanded jail
  - Begin assessment of best options for expansion vs. new build

## **County Commission/Administration**

- Take Sheriff's Department data and forecast budget needs for capital project
- Confirm available resources and funding options
- Identify other near-term major potential capital expenses for the County (ie: Other priorities that are asking for County resources.)
- Communicate with Cities about developments

## **WHAT ELSE CAN BE DONE**

- Task someone to assist in exploring other funding options
- Secure agreements with neighboring communities that commits them to use and expanded Franklin County Jail as first option when they are at overflow capacity
- Hold discussions with neighboring landowners to ensure the design of the expanded facility remains compatible with the adjoining properties.
- The Sheriff's Department can outline options for implementing a work release (or comparable) program that might alleviate demand for jail space and support more constructive use for time served among the eligible inmates/convicts. This does have its own costs and logistical needs but should be considered as part of the long-term means for managing Franklin County inmates.