

AN OVERCROWDED SANTA BARBARA COUNTY MAIN JAIL

How Long Will This Situation Continue?

SUMMARY

“Although Grand Juries have supported the construction of a North County Jail for years, the issue is more urgent now than ever before.” These words were written by the Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury in a report *issued on February 15, 2000*. While steps have been taken toward the goal of constructing a new county jail in the north, the realization remains elusive and jail overcrowding escalates.

In 2008, a Blue Ribbon Commission on Jail Overcrowding (BRC) concluded that while a jail big enough to meet the county’s needs is too expensive, a smaller jail, together with programs to prevent incarceration and recidivism, is a workable alternative. The BRC proposed that by spending the necessary funds now, the county could actually save money in the long run. By implementing the recommended programs, crime and recidivism would be reduced and relieve the need for more jail beds.

The 2009-10 Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury (Jury) agrees with the BRC that the county needs to implement alternatives to incarceration. The Jury recognizes the fiscal crisis the county is currently experiencing. However, the Jury nevertheless believes that by establishing these alternative programs now, the county will benefit by reducing the future costs of incarceration.

BACKGROUND

The central part of the main jail opened in 1971 with additions in 1988, 1992, and 1999, with a current bed capacity of 618. In 2006 an adjacent honor farm was reconfigured as a medium security facility to provide an additional 161 beds for a total of 779 beds. The current average daily population of the main jail campus is approximately 1,000 inmates and it is projected that by 2020 that average would increase to 1,800,¹ more than double its planned capacity.

Since the 1980s, various court orders have directed the county to address overcrowding. In 2008, the Blue Ribbon Commission on Jail Overcrowding (BRC) considered the high cost of a new jail facility that would meet current and future needs. It recommended a blended solution with the construction of a smaller jail (300 beds instead of the estimated need of 800 beds) in conjunction with plans to address crime prevention, alternatives to incarceration and recidivism.

¹ Blue Ribbon Commission on Overcrowding, *Final Report and Recommendations, February 2008*, p. 12

The BRC detailed the major problems associated with overcrowding and made the following recommendations:

1. Build a 300 bed facility in north county
2. Invest in prevention, intervention, and recovery programs
3. Invest in community corrections programs
4. Invest \$5.8 million per year in jail overcrowding prevention (#2 and #3 above)
5. Establish a Criminal Justice Coordinating Council--CJCC
6. Pursue and implement strategies to pay for these investments

The idea of building a new facility in northern Santa Barbara County is decades old. In 1999, the voters rejected two separate 1/4 cent sales tax measures intended to help fund construction and staffing of a new jail. The cost then was estimated to be \$53 million.

By 2008, the cost estimates had climbed to \$80.2 million. In addition, ongoing operations and maintenance costs were estimated at \$17 million annually.

In 2008, the legislature passed Assembly Bill 900 (AB 900) which would fund \$56.3 million for a new 300-bed jail facility. These monies must be expended by June 30, 2017. The state's economic condition may delay AB 900 funding.² Nevertheless, in anticipation of receiving AB 900 funding, the county purchased 50 acres of land in the Betteravia area of the Santa Maria Valley for \$3.27 million for the construction of the new jail. The county is currently funding the planning and design of the facility.

The 2008-09 Grand Jury recommended that the Board of Supervisors (BOS) "implement appropriate financial measures in fiscal year 2009-10 to allow construction of the North County Jail."³ In their response, the BOS noted the progress made to that date. They recommended that the Sheriff's Department (Sheriff) continue to pursue the project as "prudent" and stated that they would "continue to work with the state and continue to consider AB 900 grant funding."

However, the BOS also noted while they agree "appropriate financial measures should be implemented in Fiscal Year 2009-10," the BOS qualified it by adding "as is financially feasible and prudent, considering overall service delivery to the county citizens."⁴

After interviewing several county supervisors, the County Chief Executive Officer, the Sheriff and the former chair of the BRC, the 2009-10 Jury was told that even if full funding for building a new north county jail somehow can be found, the currently estimated \$17 million annual operating costs present a serious problem. The continued delay may jeopardize the availability of the \$56.3 million AB 900 funding from the state.

² Sheriff's Department PowerPoint presentation to the BRC, February 19, 2010

³ Detention Facilities Report, Findings and Recommendations, p. 3

⁴ Board of Supervisors Responses to Fiscal Year 2008-09 Grand Jury Report on "Detention Facilities." June 2, 2009

OVERCROWDING AND RECIDIVISM

In an effort to alleviate overcrowding the Sheriff instituted the following measures:⁵

- Sheriff's Work Alternative Program (SWAP) —957 booked in 2009 and kept out of jail
- GPS electronic monitoring—775 booked in 2009 and kept out of jail
- Early released inmates—1891 released 15 days early in 2009
- Plans for a Community Corrections Program day reporting center funded by a federal grant (Second Chance Act)
- Plans for a multicounty/state partnership in the Central Coast Regional Secure Community Reentry Facility in Paso Robles

The Sheriff instituted the following programs in an effort to reduce recidivism:⁶

- Helen Pedotti Inmate Learning Center
- ServeSafe© certification program (health sanitation training)
- Planning for Success (in-custody drug treatment program)

In response to the BRC's recommendations, the Sheriff also created a Criminal Justice Coordinating Council--CJCC in the fall of 2009. The CJCC brings together major stakeholders in the criminal justice system to prioritize and provide oversight and accountability of efforts to address overcrowding.⁷

There are several factors working against the efforts to combat overcrowding and recidivism in the county jail:

- Federal court order to release to their home counties an estimated 40,000 California state prison inmates over a two-year period
- With a recidivism rate of over 70%, it is likely many of those released early from state prison will re-enter the Santa Barbara court system
- Possibility that the state may extend the maximum 366 day stay in county jail for inmates who otherwise would be transferred to a state prison
- Loss of state funding for the county program for repeat offenders will impact efforts to combat recidivism
- Impact of increased crime rates due to the effect of unemployment and current economic decline
- Historical inmate growth rate assumptions
- Sheriff's budget reductions over the last two years resulting in the loss of 29.5 full time equivalent (FTE) employees, with more than 17% reduction in sworn management⁸

⁵ Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department 2008 Annual Report and 2009 update

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ Sheriff's Department PowerPoint presentation to the BRC, February 19, 2010

⁸ *Ibid*

- Likelihood of more cuts in fiscal 2010-11, which may result in more FTE reductions including custody operations level personnel at the jail. This situation may require further early release of inmates

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1

Overcrowding in the main jail continues to have a negative impact on jail operations and inmate health and safety.

Finding 2

The Blue Ribbon Commission recommended that the county focus on crime prevention, reducing recidivism, improving early release programs and exploring other proven options to incarceration, in addition to constructing a new 300-bed facility in north county.

Finding 3

The construction cost of a new 300-bed jail in north county is currently estimated to be \$80.2 million and the county's share is estimated at \$23.9 million.

Finding 4

The annual cost to the county of operating a new 300-bed jail in north county is currently estimated at \$17 million.

Finding 5

Additional sources of funding are necessary to build and operate a new 300-bed jail in north county and to ensure receipt of \$56.3 million AB 900 state construction funds.

Recommendation 1

The Board of Supervisors fully implement the Blue Ribbon Commission's recommendations to fund prevention, intervention, and recovery programs that address key factors contributing to crime and imprisonment.

Recommendation 2

The Board of Supervisors fund the implementation of the Blue Ribbon Commission's recommendation to enhance existing community corrections programs.

Recommendation 3a

The Board of Supervisors move to secure funding for a new 300-bed jail facility in north county by making a substantial fiscal commitment to the capital budget with identified sources of funding.

Recommendation 3b

The Board of Supervisors work with the Sheriff's Department to plan for a means by which to fund annual operating expenses for a new 300-bed jail facility in north county.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSE

In accordance with *Section 933.05 of the California Penal Code* each agency and government body affected by or named in this report is requested to respond in writing to the findings and recommendations in a timely manner. The following are the affected agencies for this report, with the mandated response period for each:

The SB County Board of Supervisors – 90 days

Findings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Recommendations 1, 2, 3a, 3b

The SB County Sheriff's Department – 60 days

Findings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Recommendations 1, 2, 3a, 3b