



## Commissioners address jail location concerns

**WAYNE COUNTY, OH, Jan. 14, 2022** — During a recent public meeting about the jail renovation project, Wooster City officials and Main Street Wooster representatives expressed concern about the current location of the jail and Sheriff’s Department located at 201 W. North St., Wooster.

As this was not the first time this concern was voiced, the Wayne County Commissioners sought an analysis of the financial and other factors involved in such a move.

They enlisted Youngstown-based Strollo Architects, LLC. to develop comparable estimates for renovating and expanding the current site and building an equivalent jail at a new location outside City of Wooster boundaries.

The comparison assumes the same inmate numbers, style, and retention needs identified in the proposed 248-bed model the county submitted a grant application for jail construction funding provided in current State of Ohio capital improvement appropriations, enacted in December of 2020.

That grant request was based on:

- 214 licensed beds, including 48 high-security isolation cells
- 34 medical isolation cells

According to the architect, the construction cost for renovating the current jail and expanding it with 27,000 square feet of new construction is estimated at \$30.2 million. Building a new facility on a remote site is estimated to cost \$47 million.

This is \$16.8 million more than remaining at the current site on the edge of downtown, a 55% higher cost.

There are additional operational considerations beyond the cost of construction to consider. These factors were developed in cooperation with the Sheriff's Office and outlined in a letter presented by County Administrator Patrick Herron in the Commissioner's voting session on January 12.

**Transport factors:** Transportation costs are a significant consideration, should the jail be remote to downtown courts and other services. In 2020, there were 241 inmate transports to Municipal Court, and 399 inmate transports to Common Pleas Court, according to the Sheriff's Office. This lower number is used as the baseline because it is anticipated that there will be continued use of video appearances when possible as procedures changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The jail is connected to the municipal court building, so these transports occur indoors in a secure environment. While some have suggested all visits should be virtual, a person still has a right to appear at their trial. While in-person court appearances have been significantly reduced, they cannot be eliminated.

A remote jail would introduce a vehicle and two guards for transport, impacting costs and the availability of city and village law enforcement resources. These resources would be tied up during transport to court, waiting for the court proceeding, and returning to jail. Currently, municipal court movements within the justice center are provided by the Sheriff's Office.

Safety risks are heightened during vehicular transports. Examples of added risks include:

- Vehicular accidents that could lead to escape
- Public interaction that could lead to escape
- Acquiring a weapon or other contraband

**Other factors:** Many rehabilitation services are provided within the jail, and geography is a factor, along with the relative efficiencies of accessing them upon release, depending on jail location.

The analysis points out the public safety value of having a law enforcement station in the downtown area with associated cruiser traffic. It also points out the

county jail has been located somewhere in the downtown area of the county seat since the early 1800s. Further, the former jail has been renovated and operates as a restaurant across the street from the justice center. Upscale residential construction is being built on speculation across the street.

There is also a significant possibility that efforts to identify another site for the jail would generate opposition from residents in the new area, as recently was experienced when development was proposed near the current Wooster City Schools high school.

Commissioners are actively reviewing this analysis to decide how design and financing plans can move forward. They have the duty of providing facilities for county government services.