



WAYNE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Ron Amstutz ★ Rebecca S. Foster ★ Sue A. Smail

January 12, 2022

Memo to Wayne County Commissioners

RE: Jail location question

Commissioners:

During the investigation regarding what type and size of a Jail Construction/Renovation project is needed for our current and near future needs, the question arose asking if we had/would consider moving the jail and Sheriff operations out of the current location and into an area away from Downtown Wooster.

In investigating this question, we have enlisted the aid of our project architect Strollo, out of Youngstown, Ohio. There have been multiple suggested locations both in and out of the city limits of Wooster. Performing a detailed investigation of each individual site would have been very expensive and time-consuming, so we instead focused on a generic location away from Downtown Wooster that would be more rural. If after this report, there is a desire to continue this investigation, we can look closer at individual sites; however, the overall impact of this decision will not vary from site to site.

Attached to this report is the letter from Strollo with their findings and determinations. I will recap those findings here as well. In working on the cost estimates, we used the same inmate numbers and overall style of inmate detention needs as were used in the model we proposed to the State of Ohio in our 2021 grant request. In that request, we identified that a jail with 214 licensed beds was needed (a combination of 48 individual cells and 166 beds in various levels of general population), along with another 34 medical/lockdown cells, for a total of a 248-bed facility. The cost for this is approximately \$30,200,000 million to construct, which includes a construction estimate of \$27,700,000 and a 9% contingency of \$2,500,000. This project was a combination of a complete renovation and reuse of the existing jail and the construction of a new 27,000 square foot addition attached to the current jail.

Our target remote site for the jail made the assumption that the site would be adjacent to both water and wastewater lines with enough capacity and also that sufficient power capabilities were at hand. If any suggested site did not have these utilities already in place, our costs estimates would increase significantly. The estimate also assumes we already own the site and do not have any land acquisition costs.

The cost to construct a 248-bed facility in a clean empty site has an estimated cost of \$39,023,250, which includes a construction estimate of \$37,165,000 and a 5% contingency of \$1,858,250. In addition to this cost, we would need to do some renovation to the existing jail

site. While we did not estimate the cost of a complete renovation of the jail space as we do not know what would be going into that space, we did estimate the cost to remove jail-specific infrastructure like cells, kitchen space, laundry, etc. We also included a cost estimate to replace the aging and failing systems (water, wastewater, and related items), as this is needed even if we build a new jail elsewhere. The cost estimate for this is \$8,008,000, which includes a renovation estimate of \$7,280,000 and a 10% contingency of \$728,000.

This brings the total cost of a jail constructed on a new remote site to \$47,031,250 and again, assumes we acquired the site at no cost, it is fairly flat with limited site work needed to start construction, and the availability of suitable utilities already at the location. If any of these assumptions are not correct, the cost would be higher.

There are also other factors to consider besides the cost of the facility and I will attempt to address a few of those as well.

A very important aspect of moving the jail to a remote site would be the need for increased transportation to court. To review this need, I have used transportation statistics provided by the jail. I evaluated 2020 as during this time of COVID, we have moved as many court appearances as possible to a virtual setting which eliminates the need for transportation. Some people outside of the justice system have opined that we don't need to transport to court but instead, do all visits remotely. In reality, people charged with crimes have a right to appear in court, face their accuser, and participate in their trial. By using the 2020 numbers, we are only talking about essential court transportation. In 2020, there were 241 transports to Municipal Court and 399 transports to Common Pleas Court. It is important to remember that the 241 transports to Municipal Court are all done inside the two buildings and the inmate never leaves the security of the jail until they are taken from the holding cell into the courtroom; they never cross the public's path in this process.

If the facility is moved to a remote site, all of those transportations have to be done via vehicle transportation with two guards (currently, one guard transports them to Municipal Court). This will require increased staffing and vehicle costs. More importantly, prisoner transportation is one of the most dangerous aspects of handling prisoners. There is, of course, the risk of vehicular accidents, but also, the inmate interacts with the public more in transportation, and the risk of either someone helping them escape or passing them contraband, goes up with each public interaction. This need to transport will also become a burden on every village and city police department as they are required to transport any of their prisoners to court. Currently, we do this as it is primarily to Municipal Court and we can do this within our own building. If the jail is moved to a remote site, each jurisdiction would have to pick up their prisoners, take them to court, wait for the hearing, and then return the prisoner. This will typically tie up an officer for one-half to a full day. This will cause a drain on the availability of local police officers to patrol their community.

Another aspect, currently, is when a prisoner is released, if they need to move to social or mental health services provided in the community, they are within walking distance of most of the providers. If the jail is moved to a remote site, they will be released a distance from services and available transportation.

Lastly, it has been raised as a concern that having a jail downtown is bad for the local business community. Frankly, I have not seen any proof of that other than hearsay. In reality, there has been a jail in downtown Wooster for as long as there has been a downtown. The last time we constructed a new jail, it was built right next door to the old jail and the old jail turned into a

business. Currently, there are new business and residential housing being built right next door to our current jail, even as we discuss adding onto the current jail site. When a prisoner is released from jail, the last thing they typically want to do is cause trouble and go back to jail. This also leads to another issue that must be addressed. The mere presence of law enforcement downtown is a deterrent to crime. Even just a cruiser passing by, causes anyone to pause and check their speed. If you are looking to cause problems, the more police presence means the less likely you are to act. If we move our jail out of town, we will remove from downtown Wooster the last physical police presence downtown, as the city removed their presence from downtown a few years ago. Removing the last remaining physical police presence from Downtown Wooster will not make downtown more safe, but less safe.

To recap, building a new jail in a remote site would cost over \$17,000,000 more for the same beds and result in a less convenient and safe environment. It would also reduce police presence in downtown, and in all communities, as needed resources are pulled away to transport prisoners.

It is my opinion that the best location for the County to expand our jail capacity is the current site, adjacent to the current jail and Municipal Court.

Thank you

Patrick C. Herron
Wayne County Administrator

