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Supervisor questions firm's selection to oversee planning, construction of new San Mateo County jail

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Former San Mateo County sheriff and current Supervisor Don Horsley on Tuesday questioned the wisdom of choosing a company with no prior jail-building experience to oversee planning and construction of a new correctional facility.

Horsley's colleagues, however, expressed support for real estate services firm Sares Regis Group and approved the \$1.1 million agreement, 4-1. They said it was vital that the county keep the jail planning process going.

The supervisors had been scheduled to approve the agreement as part of their consent agenda, which generally includes routine matters. Horsley pulled the item to discuss his concerns.

After the Board of Supervisors meeting, Horsley said he was still skeptical that Sares Regis could handle the job. According to the former county sheriff's research, the company's expertise is in commercial, retail and residential developments.

"I'm sure they're a fine firm," Horsley said. "They're just not jail experts."

Sares Regis, which assisted with the county's purchase of the 4.75-acre jail site on Chemical Way, said it has retained expert consultants.

Horsley also said he wanted to see more information about the costs associated with the new jail's size and programming before signing off on the number of beds it will include. According to Sheriff Greg Munks, the correctional facility could be built to accommodate 768 beds. Alternatively, one floor

could be left empty, which would lower the

total count to 512, and lower construction and operating costs.

Construction of the new jail is expected to cost as much as \$160 million.

In a statement released by Sares Regis following the supervisors meeting, Munks said he is looking forward to working with the firm. Sares Regis and the county will "gather input from all of the stakeholders to identify what size and scope of the new facility will best fit the county's long-term needs."

Board President Carole Groom said work needs to continue on the new jail because the county's existing correctional facilities are overcrowded. Meanwhile, a state plan to keep low-level offenders in county jails instead of sending them to prison would exacerbate the problem, she said.

"None of us want to be having this conversation about building a new jail, but we don't have any choice," Groom said. "We don't have the capacity to take care of these folks."

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