

# The Mercury News

MercuryNews.com

## San Mateo County supervisors expected to question whether new jail has to be as large as sheriff wants

By Bonnie Eslinger  
Daily News Staff Writer

Posted: 09/13/2011 02:00:00 AM PDT

Working against an October deadline to apply for state jail construction money, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors today will discuss how big a new jail needs to be and whether more could be done to reduce the number of inmates.

With its jails often overcrowded, the county has been planning for a new facility and bought a 4.8-acre site east of Highway 101 in Redwood City late last year. The new jail will be an addition to the downtown Maguire Correctional Facility, not a replacement.

The jail's size is expected to be the main focus of the supervisors' 3 p.m. discussion, although no decision is expected to be made at the meeting, Sheriff Greg Munks said. He said he hopes to get a ruling on the number of beds by an Oct. 14 deadline for state money through AB 900, which created a competitive grant program to fund jail construction projects.

Munks has recommended that the new facility be built to accommodate 768 to 832 beds, including those for women, at an estimated construction cost of \$150 million to \$165 million. That would raise the total capacity of the county's correctional facilities to 1,424 beds. Although the county's jails were designed to accommodate a total of 834 male and female inmates, the average daily population last month was 992, according to the sheriff's office.

The county also is bracing for an influx of roughly 400 inmates a year from now as a result of a state budget decision to keep some low-level offenders

in county jails and out of state prison.

In a memo to the board, County Manager David Boesch underscored that the new jail carries "significant cost implications" for the county budget, which had to tap into reserves this year to offset a \$50 million shortfall.

Boesch suggested the board explore alternatives to building as big a jail as Munks recommends, noting it would come with high operating costs. He also noted that the state is pushing local governments to reduce inmate recidivism rates instead of just adding new jail beds.

"I'm not yet persuaded that we need to build a new jail facility either to replace the women's facility or address some of the crowded conditions in Maguire to the order magnitude the Sheriff is recommending," Boesch wrote in an email to The Daily News.

Munks said he will bring the supervisors two other jail-size options. One calls for a facility large enough to handle 832 inmates but with an empty floor and 192 fewer beds that could be added later if ultimately needed. The other option would be a 552-bed jail, though Munks said he doesn't believe that would really be workable. "I think there'd be a good likelihood that we'd be crowded on day one," Munks said.

Several supervisors -- Don Horsley, Rose Jacobs Gibson and Dave Pine -- previously expressed reservations about the need for a large jail and wondered whether it's possible to put fewer people behind bars.



HEARTLAND QUALITY  
**OMAHA STEAKS**  
SINCE 1917

**SAVE**  
up to **64%**  
to

Plus, get  
**3 FREE Gifts**

Special Code: 45069ZWN

To order: [www.OmahaSteaks.com/print71](http://www.OmahaSteaks.com/print71)  
or call 1-877-605-0496

# The Mercury News

MercuryNews.com

A 2007 study commissioned by the county found that most male inmates were charged with nonviolent crimes, didn't face pending charges or had drug or alcohol problems but otherwise had little criminal experience.

Munks said he disagrees with the idea "that there is this huge number in custody, like there are 200 inmates we can get rid of." The county already makes significant investments in rehabilitation and programs that allow sentenced offenders to serve their time outside of jail through programs or some form of monitoring, he said.

Email Bonnie Eslinger at [beslinger@dailynewsgroup.com](mailto:beslinger@dailynewsgroup.com).

## DONATE YOUR CAR!



The Breast Cancer Research Foundation

**100% Tax Deductible**  
**Free Pick-Up Anywhere**  
**We're Available 7 Days a Week**

Donating is Fast & Easy!

Call Today **877-821-5493**

The Breast Cancer Research Foundation is a classified 501 (c)(3) charity.

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™