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## County wrangles with jail plan

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County officials will meet the second time in as many weeks to discuss just how big a new jail should be and if there are any viable alternatives to reduce the number of beds.

The Board of Supervisors met for several hours Sept. 13 with hopes of giving the planning team some direction, if not a full decision, but new Supervisor Dave Pine asked for at least one more meeting before sending the state a letter-of-intent to apply for available construction funds.

Pine, who joined the board in May, said he has not had ample opportunity to discuss the plan with his fellow supervisors as a whole and asked for input from those outside the law enforcement community.

Board President Carole Groom last week was calling a list of possible speakers, including those from health and housing, but said she doesn't want the workshop to become a free-for-all with no direction.

Groom, who like Pine joined the board mid-term, said she was willing to accommodate his request if the scheduling worked but that some of the legwork falls outside of public hearings.

"I'm not looking for any sympathy, but there's a lot of studying to do. A lot of lugging home work and reading up and meeting with people if you want to do the job well," she said, adding that Pine always seems very well-prepared.

Sheriff Greg Munks said he respects that Pine wants to make an informed decision but hopes there is a limit to how much studying can be done.

"My point is we've been at this for some time and treading over the same ground," he said.

Munks sees twin timelines at stake — one for the county to tell the state it wants to apply for money by the state but also to give the planning team the greenlight to get a design out to bid.

With the state sending back inmates beginning Oct. 4, the push is even greater to find somewhere to put them, he said.

"I'd love to put a shovel in the ground by next year," he said.

But while several of the other supervisors said they are willing to give Pine the extra information he desires, the time is now to make some decisions about the size and type of jail needed. Continuing to stall until the costs are clear only delays the inevitable construction and jeopardizes the chance at a piece of the \$300 million available by the state, said Supervisor Rose Jacobs Gibson.

"I'm not minimizing the importance, but it's two separate decisions. One is which plan do we want and secondly is how do we pay for it," she said.

The county doesn't have to even build the jail size initially chosen but officials cannot be stalled by the budget issues, she said.

"We cannot delay simply because we don't have all the answers right now," she said.

But for others, like Pine, the two are "completely linked." Pine believes the county needs a new jail, particularly to replace the women's facility on Maple Street, but said there must be a broader conversation about the local incarcerated population — who gets arrested, who is released from custody and what alternative programs could get people out of cells and back into the community.

"There are competing views of criminal justice. There is a strong law and order emphasis in this county but I think public safety is more than just courts and jails. It's also programs we have in place for substance abuse and mental health programs. It's also about being smart," he said.

Jacobs Gibson is no stranger to expressing doubts, or at least concern, about Munks' proposal for a fully-built jail of at least 760 beds. Jacobs Gibson said she didn't have enough information in the past to support a pre-architectural proposal but has since learned a lot from several meetings with Munks, jail planning staff and other stakeholders. The specter of state realignment also caused a second look as well as more insight into plans for programming, treatment and the philosophy of how to treat inmates.

"When you put it together, then you really can see the benefit of building a bigger jail," she said.

Jacobs Gibson prefers the second option which is a larger jail but only outfitted with 576 beds and an unfinished top floor or wing. The shell approach allows expansion if necessary although some officials are also mulling ways to use the space for transitional housing or other inmate programs.

Groom is also in favor.

"I don't think bigger is better but when you get overcrowded you cannot do the rehabilitation work that needs to be done and I don't want to build a facility that is obsolete the day we move in," she said.

Although Munks prefers the larger plan, he accepts the alternative.

"It gives us the incentive to do everything we can to possibly hold down the population and live within our means," he said.

Jacobs Gibson said her questions are now satisfied and needs no further information before giving the go-ahead on the second option which Munks has called a "political compromise."

"I think we have to make a decision knowing that the discussions to actually address the funding is coming. Nobody is ignoring it," she said.

Yet, for Pine, choosing to fund a jail means choosing not to fund other needs.

"We are building a new jail in San Mateo County. No matter what, it's going to cause great pain to other programs," he said.

He thinks approving a letter of intent at the Oct. 4 Board of Supervisors meeting will be fine but doesn't know that the time is now to choose a path until more concrete costs and funding strategies are known.

#### Cost estimates

In response to queries by Pine and Supervisor Don Horsley, County Manager David Boesch estimates operating the full jail will cost \$38.7 million and a phased build is \$29.4 million — both higher figures that put forth by Munks.

Munks estimates the jail to cost approximately \$165 million to build followed by up to \$31 million annually in operating costs. The county has already spent \$17 million for the site on Chemical Way in Redwood City.

Munks isn't including some costs like correctional health and food, said Horsley.

Boesch also estimates a new large jail will push the structural deficit to \$118 million for fiscal year 2015-2016.

"I know a jail is three years off but we have to look at what this does to the deficit," Horsley said.

Munks said he's been consistent about costs over the past five years and that it is not his role to find the funding in the overall county budget.

"It's not like this snuck up on us. It's the county's manager's job to figure it out. If they want me to I will but I would hope there was some planning going on behind the scenes rather than just saying it's expensive and we can't afford it," Munks said.

Munks said he doesn't recall similar pushback on the price tag when the county opted to build the San Mateo Medical Center or juvenile hall.

"I think we've pretty much covered all the ground that can be covered," he said. "It's time for a decision."

Horsley, the former sheriff who began pushing for a new women's jail in 2006, is definitely behind having a new facility but isn't sold yet on what type or size. Questions about cost led to oppose a construction contract with Sares-Regis.

#### State realignment

Horsley, the newest supervisor prior to Pine, has some insight into the need but said the situation is different as a board member and he understands why Pine wasn't ready to go ahead. Horsley, too, wants more information from probation, health, human services and nonprofits who work in the jail.

He initially thought a 350-bed jail was the goal but that "realignment really changed the whole equation," meaning the impact of more state prisoners housed locally means there require additional space.

Now, maybe 500 or 520, he thinks.

Munks said the minimum estimate by the state of 241 inmates would leave a small jail over capacity from the first day it opens. However, that estimate is low and the reality is likely at least double, he believes.

Particularly with the advent of overcrowding continuing, Horsley and Pine want greater consideration of how to manage the pre-trial population such as releasing them on electronic home monitoring or their own recognizance. Those recommendations can be made by probation or the Sheriff's Office but judges have the final say.

Pine thinks committees working on the county's realignment plan may be a good place to have conversations with all those involved, including the judiciary, about finding new ways.

Horsley is not keen on the idea of a shelled jail in which the unfinished space is used as transitional housing.

"Even with curtains, it's still a jail cell," he said.

If you go, the jail planning study session is 12:30 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 28 in Board Chambers, 400 County Government Center, Redwood City.

Michelle Durand can be reached by email: [michelle@smdailyjournal.com](mailto:michelle@smdailyjournal.com) or by phone: (650) 344-5200 ext. 102.