

Adequate jail to cost county up to \$6 million

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Consultants specializing in jail design and construction say White County needs to build a new, larger jail.

Members of the White County Council and White County Board of Commissioners received the results of a recently completed feasibility study Monday from Charles Goodman, an architect with Schenkel & Schultz, Fort Wayne.

Goodman said a new 53,700-square-foot facility capable of housing 90-140 inmates is what White County needs.

Three building schemes were considered in the feasibility study — with price tags ranging from estimated \$5.1 to \$6 million.

Three proposed sites also were proposed on 10-acre lots, allowing ample room for expansion.

One of the proposed sites would be at a location to be determined in Reynolds because of its central White County location.

The other two possible sites are located west of the Monticello city limits — on an 80-acre tract owned by the county along West Shafer Drive at county road 225N, or off U.S. 24W, south of Hubbard's GM Center.

The current 26-bed, 7,100-foot county jail, built in 1971, was considered a model of efficiency by surrounding county leaders who visited it, according to Councilman Earl Keller, a former two-term White County sheriff who worked there.

In recent years, however, it has become chronically overcrowded and cited for numerous violations by the Indiana Department of Corrections. The sheriff and county officials also have been threatened with legal action by the Indiana Civil Liberties Union.

the new jail would be 20-21 employees, Goodman said.

Councilman Keller said when he started his first term as sheriff in 1975, he often acted as the lone jailer. He said an additional jailer was added in 1982 during the final year of his second term.

Keller said he has problems understanding the drastic change in the jail's situation, especially since the size of the building has not changed and the size of the county's population has changed only slightly in the last 10 years.

But Keller and other county councilmen acknowledged Monday the population of the jail and the state and federal regulations it must adhere to have changed a lot.

Jail population patterns are evaluated in the feasibility study in terms of meals served. Keller said in 1982, the jail served 7,566 meals, or about three times fewer meals than the 24,726 meals served inmates in 1992.

County officials have taken several actions recently to help those problems, Sheriff Reg Shireman said. He said the jail has been cited for eight violations by the Department of Corrections. Six of the violations have been corrected, he said.

"The county jail is a relatively new building, but it is not large enough to house the people it has every day. The jail is 100 percent overcrowded all the time," Goodman said.

That is an exaggeration, but the jail often holds 10 and 20 more prisoners than it is rated for, Shireman said.

The county also has been accused of civil rights violations by the ICLU for its lack of exercise facilities for prisoners.

According to the feasibility study, both overcrowding and lack of exercise for inmates will get worse unless the county addresses them.

The proposed new jail would

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include 90 cells, Goodman said, including 60 maximum security cells, 30 work-release cells and 10 holding cells.

It would also include a small circuit courtroom and indoor and outdoor recreation areas for prisoners, plus a law library, required by the state. It would include locker rooms and squad rooms for employees and a basement parking garage.

"This (plan) takes you beyond the year 2032," Goodman told a joint meeting of the county commissioners and councilmen. He said the proposed facility also could be expanded if necessary.

Any decision to move forward with a new jail must come from the Board of Commissioners first, then be supported by the county council as well.

If a new facility is built, Commissioner Chuck Altman said, "Obviously, we'll have to

have a bond issue." But Altman said other alternatives should be considered first.

Commissioner Don Kremer said he would rather invest in a less expensive facility to house non-violent, work-release prisoners. He said that would ease some of the current overcrowding at the county jail.

Commissioner Dean Fleck said if the county does not act on the jail's problems, it might eventually be forced by the state to make mandated changes.

"I know that any expansion at the jail will cost a lot of money, but we may have to do it," Fleck said. But Fleck said he'd rather have the county set its own time frame than have one set for it.

"Some time in the future, we need to have more jail space. What time schedule that is, I can't tell you right now," Fleck said.