

Say NO on the Jail Bond Resolution

Dutchess County has an unprecedented opportunity to “change what a county jail is and how a criminal justice system addresses its inmates.”

We will squander that opportunity if we go forward with the current jail bond proposal.

Some background on the jail

The current jail facility has a maximum capacity of 492 beds – 292 beds in the sections built in 1984 and 1995, and 200 in temporary dorm-like facilities (PODs) installed in 2015.

The State Commission of Corrections (SCOC) authorizes the maximum number of inmates that may be confined in a specific facility. In Dutchess County, the number of inmates exceeded this number for several years resulting in the need to “house out” inmates in jails in other counties.

The cost of housing out in 2014 was approximately \$8 million. County officials estimated that we would save about \$1 million per year by using the PODs. In 2014 we had an average daily population of 469 with an average daily number of 223 housed out. By December of 2015, the average daily number of housed out inmates was down to 24.

The SCOC gave the County a variance to install the PODs; in return, the County agreed to construct new permanent correctional space.

The 1984 facility is totally inadequate and must be replaced. The 1995 facility can be renovated. Adequate space for programming needs to be included in any new construction.

Data on population statistics is from the New York State Corrections web site <http://www.scoc.ny.gov/pop.htm>

The current plan includes much more than we need

The current plan includes much more than is needed to honor the agreement with the SCOC.

- The SCOC did not ask for a new sheriff’s office. At \$36.5 million, this is almost 20% of the total bond. Jail completion 2020, two years after the completion of the sheriff’s new office.
- The SCOC did not ask for a 36 bed hospital wing with its associated costs and liabilities.
- The SCOC did not dictate the number of beds; the County decides on the number needed and justifies it to the SCOC.

If we build more beds than we need, it may be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Counties that have overbuilt have typically had a larger increase in inmates than those counties that focused on decreasing the inmate population.

The current plan will triple the County debt

The choice should not be between doing nothing and approving a \$192+ million plan.

This would be the largest capital project ever undertaken by the County. Outstanding debt as of the end of 2014 was approximately \$107 million. If this plan is approved, the County debt would be over \$300 million.

We have already spent over \$8 million on the jail project. In December 2013, the County purchased the adjoining Taylor Manufacturing property for \$1.4 million. In May 2014, the County authorized a \$6.8 million bond for the PODs.

County officials assert that the additional annual debt service cost of \$9.9 million on the new \$192 million bond would be offset by cost avoidance of \$13.6 million and would thus save \$5.3 million annually. The savings start in 2021; the costs start in 2017.

This projected savings is based on the questionable assumption that the inmate population increases over time. It does not include the cost of services and programs.

We need more services not more cells

The projected savings do not include the costs of providing the needed services and programs to reduce recidivism (keep people from returning to jail) and reduce first offenders.

Less than 1% of the plan (\$1.5 million) is for building a youth center in the city of Poughkeepsie but does not include the ongoing costs of staffing and operating that center and how that center relates to the current services and programs.

County officials assert that these needed services can be funded by grants as we will be acclaimed a national leader in criminal justice reform. Failing that, we may be able to use part of the promised \$5.3 million surplus starting in 2021.

If the promised surplus does not materialize, the high cost of servicing the debt will make it difficult to fund the needed ongoing programs and services.

Dutchess County can reduce the jail population

Nationwide the numbers of people incarcerated are trending down. In NY State we are closing prisons. A majority of voters favor decriminalization of drug laws such as those for possession of small amounts of marijuana. Counties all over the state are instituting innovative programs to reduce the number of incarcerated.

From 2005 to 2014, the Dutchess County inmate population increased at an alarming rate of 43.4%, worse than any surrounding county. During this same period, violent crime decreased in Dutchess County. In 2005, we jailed about 110 per 100,000 residents; by 2014 that number rose to about 158/100,000 residents, worse than the ratio for non-NYC counties of 144/100,000.

A majority of inmates suffer from mental health or addiction issues that are best treated outside the criminal justice system. Many others are non-violent offenders.

Many positive initiatives are underway in Dutchess County to reduce the jail population.

- Crisis Stabilization Center – a diversion center instead of jail for individuals with a mental illness and/or drug or alcohol dependency.
- Crisis intervention training for local law enforcement, corrections officers, and first responders in how to effectively deal with individuals in crisis.
- A residence for women as an alternative to jail and a “Women’s Center” day program.

Other counties are implementing successful jail population reduction programs such as:

- A bail loan fund for people accused of nonviolent misdemeanors.
- Drug Courts and Mental Health Courts.

The average length of stay for an inmate can be decreased by removing procedural bottlenecks such as time to arraignment and trial. In December 2015, 73% of the inmates in the Dutchess County jail were unsentenced – awaiting arraignment, trial, or sentencing – worse than the state wide average of 60% for all counties outside NYC. Just meeting this average would mean a significant reduction in the number of needed jail beds.

Data on population statistics is from the New York State Corrections web site <http://www.scoc.ny.gov/pop.htm>.

We need a new fiscally responsible plan

County officials assert that if legislators do not approve the plan on March 21 exactly as unveiled on February 4, the State Commission of Corrections (SCOC) will revoke our variance for the PODs and throw the County into financial chaos. This makes no sense.

This date needs to be extended to allow the public and legislature adequate time to review alternative plans. Let’s build what we need, not an over-capacity compound.