

Where We Build the Jail is Everyone's Problem By Alison Holderbaum

Alison Holderbaum is an Information Science & Technology, Geographic Information Science, and Regional and City Planning student at the University of Oklahoma.

The debate over where to build the new Oklahoma County jail is well deserved. It is concerning to know that you might have to deal with the jail near your house, children's school, work, place of worship, or another location important to you. However, as a community, we need to remember that no matter where the jail is built, it will be in a location that is important to someone. The Oklahoma County commissioners recently picked the site 901 E. Grand Boulevard in Del City to be the home of the new jail. After listening to push-back from Del City leaders and citizens, they still voted to choose Del City as the location for the new jail. However, I feel that the commissioners need to reconsider the other sites that remain on their list which, according to Matt Patterson at NonDoc (Patterson, 2024) are located at Reno Avenue and Exchange Avenue, Southwest 74th Street, and Rockwell Avenue, and I-240 and Sunnyslane Road.

We cannot continue to force unwanted facilities on underprivileged communities. Oklahoma County undoubtedly needs a new jail but it could be devastating for Del City. On average, the citizens of Del City are less likely to be white or wealthy compared to others in Oklahoma County. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Oklahoma), Del City's median household income in 2022 was \$48,200 compared to \$62,505 for Oklahoma County. This along with a 20.6% poverty rate and 53.9% white population compared to 16.0% and 69.5% for Oklahoma County, respectively, makes it harder for citizens of Del City to move away from the jail if built. The jail location is near schools, raising concerns for the safety of children in the area if inmates escape the jail. There are also financial concerns related to additional costs that the jail might incur for Del City as well as the potential impact on economic development and business in the area. While the jail site uses empty land, it is still near homes and schools and will not operate in isolation from the pre-existing buildings that surround it.

From a city planning perspective, it's easy to put the jail anywhere that has enough properly zoned land. But we have to remember that each location is home to someone. If you don't want a jail next to your home or your kid's school, chances are someone else doesn't either. We have to remember that this is a problem for everyone in our community to solve together, not for just one group to battle themselves. While we may not be able to find a perfect location for the jail, we need to be understanding of our neighbors and their concerns, rather than forcing them to live with something we don't want in our own backyards. Ultimately, the county commissioners need to reconsider the remaining sites before forcing the citizens of Del City to shoulder the weight of the new jail. While it is likely that the City of Del City is going to sue the County, it should not take legal action for the county commissioners to do what is right,

especially with so much pushback from those who will actually be impacted by the location of the jail.

Sources:

Patterson, M. (2024, February 21). Despite Del City's lawsuit threat, Grand Boulevard site picked for new Oklahoma County Jail. *NonDoc*.

<https://nondoc.com/2024/02/21/despite-del-city-threat-grand-boulevard-site-picked-oklahoma-county-jail/>

U.S. Census Bureau *QuickFacts: Oklahoma*. (n.d.). Retrieved February 22, 2024, from

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/OK/HSG445222>