

Monroe County

Interested in learning more? Want to help local governance value people over punishment? Join us!

Meetings: Thursdays 6:00-7:30 at 611 W 12th St.

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**wants to build
a new jail**

Why?

Proponents say the jail is ...

- old (it was built in 1984, so it's less than 40 years old),
- too small (it can hold 294 people, which is more than the average count for the last five years),
- and in bad shape [Source: *Monroe County 2020 Criminal Justice & Incarceration Study, Ken Ray, RJS Justice Services*].

What about the current jail's conditions?

Many of us saw Sherriff Marte's presentation on the state of the jail at the CJRC on January 23rd and were appalled by the inhumane conditions at the jail.

The jail in its current state is unacceptable. That point is inarguable. What can be argued however is the response to that point. County officials want to fix the problem by building a new jail at great expense. They have not determined however the cost of renovating the existing jail.

In the report commissioned by the county, Dr. Kenneth Ray, recommends that "County official should complete a study that compares the capital, maintenance, and operating costs of renovating the existing facility to new construction."

Nobody knows the actual cost of fixing our current jail!
Doesn't it seem we should know the cost of repairs before we build a new jail that will cost an estimated \$70 million?

Additionally, a new jail wouldn't be built for 5-10 years. The current jail needs repaired **now**!



Isn't there anything else we could do?

If we jail fewer people, will that make us less safe?



Absolutely. Pipeline controls such as diversion, citation instead of arrest, mediation, leniency in sentencing, more people out on O.R., and more accessible health care, including mental health care, could decrease the incarcerated population. Fewer people in the jail means a better ratio of staff, more programming space, more visitation time possible, room for renovation...

It might surprise you, but it's not historically clear that tough on crime policies have reduced crime. A foundational academic text on this question, *The Crime Drop in America*, looks at the huge drop in crime during the early 1990s and the most credible explanations. In short, criminologists have explained for decades that factors like increasing employment opportunities are historically more likely to decrease crime than increased investment in police and incarceration.

Locally, the incredibly high recidivism rate is one clue that reminds us that despite what we've been led to believe... jail is not necessarily the best solution to address the question of crime.



What would it cost to renovate the existing jail?

Will building a new jail really help the local economy?

Why does the county really want this jail?



Nobody knows. The reports it generated through consultants guessed at a total number, but didn't include line-item estimates.

No. The kinds of building materials and standards required for a jail are too specialized for local companies. This would put money only in the pockets of large national companies experienced in prison construction. Local money would just leave the region.

This is a complicated question. Some people think a "nicer" building would be better for people who work and live in it. Some people really want to help and don't know what else to do. Some people believe there are bad people who need to be isolated and punished (although many people in jail are pre-trial and therefore presumptively innocent).

There is enough of this punitive mindset in Indiana and nationally that some people think this is a fundable project, while building a really excellent mental health care center would not be.

Where would a new jail be?

Until recently, the proposed site was all the way out on Fullerton Pike by Monroe Hospital on I-69. Due in large part to community involvement and outcry, that property was not rezoned for jail use and is no longer in consideration. Despite widespread concern of a facility being so far from social services and without access to public transit, the County Commissioners are "moving [their] search out into the county" (Jones, CJRC January 9, 2023, 30:28).

What would it cost?

We can only estimate based on the previous Fullerton Pike property. The land was \$10.02 million. The proposed building was estimated at \$50-60 million. This is just "Phase I," *without* the services proponents envision, including mental health provision, probation, and administrative offices. Everyone involved admits this is the lowball number.

Where would the money come from?

The main source of funding for the proposed project would be the recent 51% increase in income tax. They are also looking to examples in other areas of pandemic relief funds being used for jail and prison construction. In addition, they hope to draw upon medical funding sources like Medicaid.

Because Medicaid refuses to fund the operation of a coercive/non-medical institution like a jail, conversations last October turned to proposing "a facility with secure rooms" to potentially get around funding limitations. This goes against recommendations from the latest criminal punishment report, commissioned by the county. The report emphasized that "...jail is never going to be an effective mental health treatment provider and should not be relied upon as such." We think this applies to any coercive facility, regardless of what you call it.

Questions Nobody is Asking



Why couldn't we use this money to build a mental health center that is not a jail?

Why can't we renovate the existing jail?

If the jail is that bad, what will we do in the 5-10 years it will take to build the new one?



Hmm. We don't know. That does seem like a good idea....

Again, hmmm.... This question is not part of the official conversation. The county has not considered this in full. We believe local government owes its taxpayers (us!) a full investigation of the possibilities. A provisional estimate given by the Ray report was \$22-\$56 million, potentially much less than the estimated \$70 million cost of building a new jail!

Again... crickets... Nobody is even talking about, much less proposing solutions to this problem.



Will the federal government force us to build a jail if we don't?

Will the ACLU sue the county again if we don't build a new jail?



The simple answer is no. To explain: Some jails do operate under federal oversight. Chicago's Cook County, for example, operated its jail under federal oversight for over 40 years! But that requires a serious process. First, the Department of Justice would have to investigate our jail and mandate improvements.

Probably not. This worry is based on the 2008 lawsuit brought by the ACLU when people in the jail were forced to sleep on the floor and eat cold food. The jail renovated in response to that lawsuit so that conditions are somewhat better now. They could be even better if the jail population were smaller [source: *Herald Times*, 2008, "9:20 a.m.: Monroe County sued over conditions in jail"].

Ken Falk, Legal Director of Indiana ACLU, has also said privately that he is not interested in suing the jail right now.