

CURRENT SITUATION. The current jail was built in the mid-90's with a capacity of 130. It was poorly constructed and not designed for expansion. Today, the average daily population is 195 with peak at 242. This means that the Sheriff routinely outsources 30-50 inmates daily at a cost, creating significant risk while transporting inmates.

Currently, there are 70 different non-compliance issues with our jail as defined by the American Correctional Association Standards for Adult Correctional Facilities and by the Georgia Standards for Adult Pretrial Detention Facilities.

Since there is no feasible way to expand or renovate current jail to become compliant with state and federal regulations, there is no question that we need a new jail.

During the March 18, 2019 Habersham County Board of County Commissioners' meeting, the commission voted to include a Bond Referendum on the November ballot for the purpose of building a new jail. This means that the people of Habersham County – not the County Commissioners - will decide if they want Habersham taxpayers to pay additional property tax to cover the debt service on a jail bond.

DUE DILIGENCE. The County Commission, County Manager, and Sheriff have been discussing a new jail since 2016. The Commission has done research through the Sheriff's office, jail consultants, architects, Chief Superior Court Judge, Magistrate Judge, and others looking for ways to efficiently meet current demands and compliance standards while planning for future growth. We have closely analyzed data from the Governor's Office, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Georgia Sheriff's Association, and the Georgia Jail Report. In addition, the County Manager and I have met personally with each Clarkesville City Council member as well as the Mayor and City Manager to discuss any concerns they may have with a new jail.

What is an appropriate size for the jail as size dictates cost? The complexity about the proper size lies not just in using available data to project county population, but also using additional data to extrapolate inmate population for the next 30+ years. To further complicate matters, the size of the jail must include a mandated 10% increase in projected populations for each individual classification including: minimum, medium, and maximum security for both male and female inmates at any given time.

NEXT STEPS. While there are many numbers floating around the community, the fact is, the Commission has not decided on the size of the jail. We are doing our due diligence to ensure our projections are accurate based on hard data. Likewise, we are doing our best to make sure we spend taxpayer money as wisely as possible, not just to meet current needs but also for future expansion.

I expect us to soon be able to present revised projections and cost estimates so that when you go to the polls in November, you will be armed with all the facts.

PERSONAL NOTE. As a Commissioner, I have learned sometimes there are situations where there simply is not a perfect answer. Sometimes, we have to make decisions that are the best of what is before us. The truth is, I wish we didn't have to build a new jail. No one wants to spend money on jails. I wish crime was on a downward slope instead of an upward tick. Unfortunately, with increases in drug related crimes, probation revocations, non-compliance issues, and other factors, it would be irresponsible of us not to build. The key is to build as cost effective as possible while meeting current demands and

planning for future. As always, know I am available to answer any questions or suggestions you may have.