

Facility Needs Committee
Recommendations from Study Task Force
November 2006

Members on Task Force: Elmer Brinkman, Lesli Hanson, Brad Johnson, Claire Konold, Judy Kos, Bobbie LaFramboise, Greg Maag, John Redlinger, Lee Schoenbeck, Jack Thomas, Larry Wilson

Review of Findings: Through an extensive review of the facility needs given by personnel from the Sheriff's Department, Police Department, Emergency Management, Highway Patrol, Department of Corrections, Department of Criminal Investigation, and Court Services, it has been determined that the facilities we currently utilize are not adequate to meet today's needs of Watertown and the surrounding communities. The committee was able to tour the facilities and meet with all parties above to discuss the facilities. One common theme that we heard over and over is that all of the above parties wish to continue to work together in a common facility because of expertise and resources that they share with each other. They believe, as do we, that the spirit of cooperation and collaboration that is apparent from the different departments leads to more effective and more cost efficient government agencies. The specifics in the facilities we observed are listed below:

DETENTION CENTER

The Detention Center was built in 1974 with a total capacity for 38 adult inmates. Through subsequent remodeling of the facility, the current capacity is at 70 inmates, but oftentimes there is an overflow of inmates. When that occurs, the inmates must be housed on cots in the basement of the Detention Center. While on our tour, we observed inmates sleeping on cots in the basement. The Detention Center met the needs of 1974, but today's needs are much greater and more complex. Research confirms that jail facilities are designed to meet the needs of the next 25 years, the current Detention Center is 32 years old. Several issues that the committee discussed and observed are below:

The Facility and Today's Needs

1. Adult and juvenile inmates. The Detention Center is at or above inmate capacity much of the time because of the demand of Codington County, as well as outlying counties. While 80% of the inmates belong to Codington County, the jail is also a regional jail which houses prisoners from outside counties who pay the county \$50.00 per day to house prisoners. The original facility was not built to house juvenile prisoners who must be clearly separated from the adult population. There is a definite need for more space and a defined juvenile facility.

2. Design issues of the building. The original design of the Detention Center utilized the first floor only. With the increase in personnel, office space has been created in every available space, including the basement. Because of the original design, there is a problem with the plumbing in the building. There have been many times that raw sewage has been in the basement due to prisoners stuffing items down the toilets. This problem has made the offices of the detectives, Emergency Management personnel, the DCI agents, and the Highway Patrol personnel susceptible to unhealthy conditions. Other design problems:
- A. Evidence Rooms – Because of the need for additional space, the Evidence Rooms are located in the basement of the Detention Center. Not only have the Evidence Rooms experienced the sewage problem, but there have also been water and mildew problems. This is particularly concerning because of the need to maintain the integrity of the evidence.
 - B. Communication Center – Codington County currently provide Emergency 911 service to four counties. The Communication Center is a technological hub on the first floor with two workstations for the four counties. As the Detention Center continues to be a regional facility, we believe two more counties would like to be added to the Emergency 911 Communication Center. If this would happen, there would be a need for an additional workstation. There is not room for an additional workstation in this small work area.
 - C. Interview Rooms – There are privacy issues because of the inadequate space at the Detention Center. We observed the dissection and partitioning of small rooms in the basement to create additional office space for detectives to question suspects and victims. We observed a make-shift office in a closet where interviewing is done.
 - D. Entrance and waiting area – We believe that the entrance and waiting area at the Detention Center is of concern because the current area serves many purposes. The waiting area is the place where inmates check back from work release, community constituents do business with the County, visitors talk with inmates, and people talk to officers for help that they may need. We were told by law enforcement personnel that there have been times when both the victim and the suspect are in the entrance and waiting area at the same time. This is very uncomfortable and can cause a volatile situation. There are also not public restrooms or a public telephone available.

3. Technology – There is a definite need for additional space for technology, as well as additional power receptacles and cable conduit space for equipment. We observed the need for wiring closets and general wiring issues due to technological advancements in the law enforcement arena. We observed computer servers in a back corner of the Records Room on a cart where a door needed to be shut so that people could work on the servers. The main equipment room for the servers is located in the basement where there are moisture problems and water seepage.

COURTHOUSE

Through discussion with court personnel and our observations, we also believe that the Courthouse facility does **not meet the needs** of the current court system. The Courthouse, built in 1929, met the needs of that time. But today, our court system has additional and more complex issues.

The Facility and Today's Needs

1. Space/facility is antiquated. There is a definite need for additional space to meet the needs of today's court system. Specifically, there is only one courtroom available for jury trials. We were told by court system personnel that trials need to be scheduled at two week intervals in order to meet the demanding needs of the courtroom. Trials have had to be re-scheduled up to one year later because of the backlog to the court room. Remodeling the structure has been looked at with regards to adding an additional courtroom, but it was found that the structure of the Courthouse will not allow for moving walls to expand to provide additional court rooms.
 - A. **Handicap Accessibility** - Because of the regulations in the American Disability Act, we are concerned that the court room, bathroom, and jury room are not handicapped accessible. This lack of accessibility puts the court system at risk for a potential lawsuit. There are steps and platforms throughout the court room, bathroom, and jury room that would prevent a wheelchair bound person to move freely.
 - B. **Technology** – Because of the technology advancements, many up-to-date courtrooms are equipped with white boards, Elmo presentation systems, and other technological advancements that are needed for trial situations. Our facility would not allow that type of technology because of the age of the building and the internal wiring needs. These advancements are tools that are needed in today's court system.
 - C. **Additional rooms needed** - We observed that there is not a room for attorneys to confer with clients and families privately. All parties have to use the hallway for their conferencing. The hallway is the only place for people to congregate waiting for or after trials. We were told there have been volatile trials where groups of people had to congregate outside the courtroom. This leads to safety concerns.

2. Safety for judges, personnel, victims, etc. In order to maintain as safe of environment as possible, we are concerned with security issues with the Courthouse and parking lot. We are concerned with the access to the judges and courtroom that is open and visible. The Courthouse is a beautiful building that is rich in history for this community, but the Courthouse was built at a time when safety was not a primary concern.

Recommendations as a result of our findings: Our role as a citizen's committee was to listen and observe whether or not the facility is adequate for today's needs. We unanimously agree that the present facility at the Detention Center and the Courthouse (judicial system) does not meet the present needs of this community and further study should continue. We recommend that further study:

1. Include as many of the surrounding counties as possible in the discussion.
2. Explore funding sources from city, county, state, and federal granting sources.
3. Provide tours for the community so citizens can fully understand the overcrowding and technology needs.
4. Proceed in a conservative and responsible manner to ensure a process where all stakeholders will be optimally served.
5. Research the usage of the existing structures for other purposes if a new facility is recommended through the study.

Thank you for allowing us to serve in this capacity.