

Justice Center Briefing Sheet

Sheet 1, January 2005

Planning Project Overview

Portage County completed a Long Range Facilities Study in March, 2004. The goals of the study were to determine and prioritize needs, address centralized vs. decentralized government, involve the community's businesses and public residents, and create solutions that can be implemented.

Two of the findings of the study were that the Jail is operationally inefficient and staff intensive and the Courthouse is not secure and doesn't meet programmatic needs. These findings were based on the following concerns:

Jail Utilization: The jail has capacity for 79 inmates. In 2004 the average daily inmate population was 114. As a result, inmates were shipped to neighboring counties at a cost to Portage County of \$335,000. Since 1999 Portage County has spent in excess of \$1.4 million for housing prisoners in other counties. Annually, the county is experiencing an increase in inmate population of approximately 6%; a trend that results in higher annual costs for housing prisoners outside of the county.

Jail Design: The Portage County jail is considered a "linear design." This design has long corridors with housing units (cell blocks) that hold 6 to 13 inmates. This design was a more common design when the jail was built. Jail design has evolved over the past decade, resulting in more effective and efficient facilities. Communities that have utilized contemporary design and operational practices have realized a long term benefit through increased efficiency and effectiveness.



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Courthouse Security: The present courthouse was built in 1958. Justice system needs have greatly increased since that time, resulting in additional space needs for staff and public access. To create additional space, the new jail was built across the street from the courthouse, requiring jail staff to transfer inmates through public corridors, and resulting in compromised security for citizens, staff, and inmates.

There is little security in courthouse operations as well. The facility perimeter, courtrooms, public entries and most offices have no physical security features. Visitor screening as well as secure waiting areas for witnesses and inmates during court processes is limited. The Wisconsin Supreme Court is charged with improving the safety of courthouses across Wisconsin. They have recommended standards for security that counties must consider in existing and new facilities. These standards will be of increasing concern if left unmet.

Courthouse Space: Additional services and staff have consumed all space within the existing courthouse. This has left limited room for expansion and public use of meeting rooms. Privacy, efficiency and user satisfaction are compromised in daily operations.

Co-location of Law Enforcement Operations: There is ongoing discussion between city of Stevens Point and county officials regarding joint dispatch and/or co-location of law enforcement operations. The benefits and liabilities of these options will be examined and considered as part of the Justice Center planning project.

Planning Process: In September of 2004, the Portage County Board of Supervisors approved a resolution that prioritized the continued study of the courthouse and jail needs. Toward that end, the County Board has supported a study process that includes local business representatives, city officials, justice system stakeholders and county board members. Together, they have learned more about the justice system's needs and developed objectives that include strong public engagement. Planning members recognize the significant implications of new Courthouse and Law Enforcement Center on the community. They have committed to a deliberative process with seeks community input and collaboration on the development of strategies that define the future of justice in Portage County.

Planning members have identified four essential "roles" in the planning process: (1) Citizens-business representatives, educational system leaders, members of board and community services clubs, other interested community members; (2) City –Common Council members and city officials including the Mayor, Community Development Director, and Police Chief; (3) Justice System-Justice Coalition members including Judges, Sheriff, DA, Clerk of Courts, Jail Administrator, defense attorneys, victim advocates, and offender representatives; and (4) County-County Board Supervisors, county staff including the finance director, corporation counsel, planning staff, facility, purchasing staff, and UW-Extension staff.

Working together they have created a timeline and a request for additional technical assistance in gathering the information and input needed to make wise choices for our community. Public forums, media presentations, and regular project meetings will be held throughout this process to ensure ongoing access to information and public engagement. Project information will be available on the county web site at www.co.portage.wi.us



For more information about the Justice Center Planning Project, contact the Portage County Purchasing Department at 715.346.1333

