

Officials: New jail needed

EAGLE TIMES

TUESDAY
APRIL 24, 2007

Facility could cost more than \$45 million

By AARON ALDRIDGE
Staff Writer

Sullivan County needs a new jail, according to the jail facility needs assessment presented to the Sullivan County Delegation on Monday.

"Ideally we would break ground in the spring of 2008," Sullivan County Commissioner Jeff Barrette said. "But there are a lot of hurdles."

The assessment, compiled by Kenneth Ricci and Laura Maiello of Ricci Greene Associates of New York, proposed the construction of a new facility at a cost of more than \$45 million. Two other options which include some sort of renovation to the old facility would cost almost the same amount.

"The only thing that can be used from the old building is the foundation," Ricci said.

If the delegation approves the project, residents would see a potential tax impact of between 80 and 90 cents per \$1,000 of property value, according to Barrette.

"That does not include operating expenses," Barrette said.

"The preliminary projected total tax impact would be between \$1.15 and \$1.25. We need to be reasonable and honest about the cost."

The current jail was built to house 44 inmates, but routinely houses more than 100 on average, according to Maiello. The facility is operating over its design capacity, resulting in severe overcrowding.

The report states that the median age for the inmates is 24, and 82 percent of them are in jail for nonviolent offenses. Additionally, 75 percent are medium to high risk substance abusers and 25 percent are on psychotropic medication.



"The preliminary projected total tax impact would be between \$1.15 and \$1.25. We need to be reasonable and honest about the cost."

Jeff Barrette

Sullivan County Commissioner

"The jail is a turnstile," Ricci said. "There are a lot of admissions and releases."

The report projects the jail will need 194 beds by 2018 and 278 beds by 2025 if the current judicial system remains the same. Ricci said the plans for the new jail target growth within the next 10 years.

"That is the planning target," Ricci said. "We find 10 years is a good comfortable time for future planning."

If constructed, the new jail would have five housing units. The current facility has three. The jail would be two stories with mezzanine housing and be constructed at the county complex in Unity.

To run the new facility, the county would need to hire 28 additional personnel with an

See **JAIL** - Page A8

JAIL FROM PAGE A1

increase in salary and benefits of just over \$1 million per year. The current base salary and benefits for the 35 people working at the jail is about \$2 million per year.

Additional energy costs for the new facility would also see a dramatic increase. The current cost for the jail is about \$87,000 per year with the projected energy costs for the new jail estimated to be more than \$500,000 per year.

According to Ricci, if the county chooses to do nothing

and not build a new jail, the construction costs will increase between 7 percent and 10 percent per year, or about \$4.5 million. He also said that cost does not account for potential lawsuits filed by inmates because of the overcrowding.

If the delegation approves it, a \$45 million bond would be issued at 5 percent interest over a period of 30 years.

Aaron Aldridge can be reached at (800) 545-0347 ext. 139, or by e-mail at aaldridge@eagletimes.com.