

## Corrections center, jail upgrade backed

◆ **Sullivan County:** The new 68-bed center would house a drug program and take the pressure off the current county jail.

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**NEWPORT** — Sullivan County commissioners voted yesterday to spend \$7.1 million to build a Community Corrections Center at the county complex in Unity and to upgrade the existing county jail there.

The 68-bed community corrections building would alleviate overcrowding at the existing jail, which regularly houses twice its inmate capacity, for at least 10 years, Interim County Manager Greg Chanis said. The \$5.65 million building would house a 90-day residential drug treatment program with a clinical staff and programs for inmates' families that are currently unavailable in Sullivan County.

The proposal, which includes \$1.45 million in safety and security upgrades at the existing jail, is now in the hands of the county delegation. If approved in its cur-

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rent form, the project would be funded through a 10-year loan, with payments beginning in December 2009.

That means the project wouldn't impact the county's proposed budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1, which could increase as much as 32 percent over the current year if the delegation approves the budget the county commission proposed last month.

The planned improvements at the current jail include installation of a keyless security system that could be controlled remotely from the jail's command center as well as fire alarm and sprinkler systems, the lack of which raises safety and liability concerns, Chanis said.

The three Sullivan County commissioners yesterday chose to support the 68-bed proposal over the originally proposed 44-bed building that would have cost a total of \$5.8 million, including the planned upgrades to the existing jail.

"We feel pretty strongly that this is the right way to go," said Chanis. "It's never good news to tell people you want to spend \$7 million of their tax money, but the county has an obligation to run a corrections system."

The ultimate goal of the Com-

munity Corrections Center is to reduce the need for secure jail beds in Sullivan County, which cost taxpayers \$63.73 a day, according to Ross Cunningham, superintendent of the county's corrections department. Beds at the Community Corrections Center would cost several dollars less per day, he said.

The facility is also designed to address the county's high recidivism rates as well as an intergenerational phenomenon that frequently leads to fathers and sons being behind bars in Sullivan County at the same time.

If the project is approved, Cunningham and County Attorney Marc Hathaway plan to work toward major sentencing reform. Sentences would be based on a continuum-of-care model that would include residential substance abuse treatment, life skills education, family services and post-release programs.

Chanis said the county delegation, which comprises all the state representatives from Sullivan County, has not yet scheduled a meeting to discuss and vote on the corrections proposal. If the project were approved this summer, construction would likely begin next spring, Chanis said.

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