



County Jail—Special Edition

3rd Quarter 2022

www.co.beltrami.mn.us

Beltrami County Mission and Values: We will strive to be the catalyst to firmly establish a community that promotes healthy families, environmental quality, expanding economic opportunity and a quality of life second to none.

Letter to the Citizens from Sheriff Ernie Beitel

For many years the Beltrami County Sheriff's Office has been working with our community and the Minnesota Department of Corrections to identify and address the deficiencies of the Beltrami County Jail, but unfortunately it has come to the point where the work put into to correcting or mitigating the deficiencies or challenges is no longer feasible. In 2019 the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) acknowledged Beltrami County's diligent work to correct the deficiencies, but kindly told us "Enough was enough".

Instead of being given a "sunset date" for our Jail in 2019, which in reality means the closure of our current facility, we entered into an agreement with the DOC to begin a process to methodically address the future needs of the Beltrami County Jail.

Over the years, I and the staff at the Sheriff's Office have been very deliberate in sharing what our challenges have been with you, the public. Transparency with you has been at the forefront of everything that has transpired with this process. News articles, public engagement, and the quarterly County Newspaper have all been used to inform you of your Jail's challenges, including our greatest challenge; overcrowding. Being able to incarcerate those arrested in our own jail facility and not housing them elsewhere has been our biggest and most expensive challenge to date. For several years now the overcrowding and rising crime rates have forced the Sheriff's Office to house inmates in other Minnesota Jails. The cost of doing this is very expensive for Beltrami County taxpayers: between \$55 and \$110 per day, per inmate. In 2021 you paid other counties just over \$350,000 to house Beltrami County's inmates. In 2022, the estimation will almost topple \$650,000 and in 2023 it is estimated to be greater than \$900,000 when you factor in the rising transportation costs. This will only continue to rise. This is an uncontrollable cost that will continue to burden our taxpayers if not corrected.

Another significant challenge your Jail faces is the current design of the facility which was originally designed in 1985. It was a state of the art facility when it opened in 1989 with an 81 bed capacity. But by the time it opened, it was already recognized that it would not meet the future needs. Ten (10) years after it originally opened the need for additional capacity was already in the works. Fortunately the Minnesota Department of Corrections relaxed some of its operating rules and allowed Beltrami County to remodel by adding additional beds through a process called double bunking.

But that wouldn't be the end of remodeling. Overcrowding was again a challenge only a few years later prompting yet another remodel that was completed in 2004 that added a 60 bed minimum security unit to the basement. After that remodel we thought we had used every inch of available space in the secure footprint of the facility but when DOC requirements changed again in 2014 we responded by expanding the footprint of the secure facility, moving the kitchen and administrative offices, which freed up space for additional programming and inmate needs.

But that wouldn't be the first, nor the last change imposed on us from the DOC, when in 2015 a new inmate classification system needed to be implemented. Prior to 2015, inmates were classified as either minimum, general population, or maximum. With the new requirements came the challenge of meeting four (4) additional classification requirements. These changes were in a direct response to our changing society, as well as the increased number of those inmates with mental illness, chemical dependency, or both. The Beltrami County Jail is and continues to be the

largest mental health and chemical dependency holding facility in the County. Jails should never have been used for this purpose, nor were they ever intended to be. But they are and continue to be used in that capacity in every jail nationwide.

The inmates of today are not the inmates of yesterday. The rise in violent crime, compounded by the rise in inmates with Mental Health and Chemical Dependency needs, that are exacerbated by a very unhealthy inmate population, have drastically changed our Jail beyond its intended use.

The Beltrami County Jail is also one of the most dangerous jails in Minnesota, both for the inmates and for the staff that work in them. Inherently, being in jail or working in a jail comes with risks, but with a diverse and violent inmate population of today, the current design of the Beltrami County Jail makes it a more dangerous and labor intensive workplace. The physical building was not designed to function with the challenges of overcrowding and the inmate of today. Both of which has required us to add considerably more staff, which in turn costs the taxpayer more and more every year. Being incarcerated or working in the Beltrami County Jail is dangerous, but the design of our jail shouldn't be a factor that increases that risk. No other jail in Minnesota, of comparable size, has as many assaults on their staff as your Jail has right here in Beltrami County.

What has been highlighted is just the tip of the iceberg for the challenges your Beltrami County Jail handle on a daily basis. That is why, after a public comment period and a public hearing your Beltrami County Board of Commissioners will be making a very big decision and depending upon your input may be the most expensive venture Beltrami County Taxpayers may face. Why? What if we left it well alone? What if we remodeled or built a new jail. Wouldn't doing nothing, leaving it well alone, not cost us taxpayers anything? That is a few of many questions that we asked to be answered in the Feasibility & Needs Assessment that was presented to the Board of Commissioners and the public on August 24, 2022. Not only did we ask those questions but we asked an additional 5 questions or scenarios be answered, along with what each will cost the taxpayer when projected out 10, 20, and 30 years respectively. We also asked that each scenario have the advantages and disadvantages for each explained, as well as the costs associated with building and operational costs of each scenario. The scenarios asked to study were:

- Maintain the status quo –also known as do nothing
- Operating as a 36 hour holding facility
- Renovation of the current facility
- Expansion of the current facility
- Construction of a new facility with;
 - Tearing down and rebuilding on the existing property or
 - Building on adjacent property
- Construct a Regional Jail Facility-developing partnerships with other County's or law enforcement entities facing similar needs
- Close our jail entirely and rely on housing inmates in other jail's across Minnesota

I hope you'll learn more about the Jail and provide feedback by taking a survey and submitting your comments at:

<https://www.co.beltrami.mn.us/Jailprojectportal.html>

Sincerely, Ernie Beitel, Beltrami County Sheriff

Which Option is Right for Beltrami County?

According to the recent Jail Needs Assessment and Feasibility Report (dated 8/24/2022), Beltrami County is projected to spend in the range of \$377 million to \$536 million over the next 30 years on personnel, operations, food, medical, building services, boarding of inmates, inmate transportation, and capital expenditures on the County correctional system.

The assessment evaluated 7 options to meet the projected jail inmate bed space needs for Beltrami County over the next 30 years including the total cost of each option.

Option 1 Maintain the Status Quo

Key considerations:

- Capital construction costs for expanding or replacing the jail would be avoided
- Safety concerns for staff and inmates will not be addressed, leading to increased liability
- The growing inmate population must be transported to other jurisdictions, needing additional transportation staff and vehicles
- The costs for housing out inmates will continue to increase
- Increased safety risk and liability to Sheriff & County during transports.
- A greater amount of local tax dollars will be spent out of county
- Infrastructure systems will become more expensive to maintain
- Needed training space for staff and services space for inmates would not be addressed
- No ability to control the amount and types of services offered to the inmate population when housed out of county
- More inmates would be housed away from their families and local community
- The Minnesota DOC may downgrade the jail certification if current deficiencies are not addressed
- Estimated total 30-year cost: \$501 million
- Only funding option is the property tax levy

Option 2 Operate as a 36-hour holding facility

- Remodel and expand the Booking Center
- Expand the vehicle sally port

Key considerations:

- Capital construction costs for expanding or replacing the jail would be avoided
- Fewer inmates would be housed which would reduce the burden on the current infrastructure systems
- Housing fewer inmates would free existing space to expand and remodel the booking area
- Fewer detention officers would be needed for a holding facility rather than a full-service jail
- Most of the inmate population must be transported to other jurisdictions, leading to the need for additional transportation staff and vehicles
- Increased safety risk and liability to Sheriff & County during transports
- The costs for housing out inmates will continue to increase
- A greater amount of local tax dollars will be spent out of county
- Even with the reduced burden, the infrastructure systems will remain expensive to maintain
- Needed training space for staff and services space for inmates would not be addressed
- There would be no ability to control the amount and types of services offered to the inmate population when housed out of county
- More inmates would be housed away from their families and local community
- Estimated total 30-year cost: \$504 million
- Capital Construction: \$2.1 million (included in total 30-year cost)
- Only funding option is the property tax levy

Option 3 Renovate the existing facility

- Many of the core systems and spaces would be renovated and upgraded
- No additional bed spaces would be constructed

Key considerations:

- Safety concerns for staff and inmates would be addressed, reducing potential liability
- Needed training space for staff and services space for inmates would be addressed
- An increased number of inmates would be transported to other jurisdictions, leading to the need for additional transportation staff and vehicles
- Increased safety risk and liability to Sheriff & County during transports
- Remodeling the areas of greatest need will likely reduce the inmate housing capacity
- The costs for housing out inmates will continue to increase
- A greater amount of local tax dollars will be spent out of county
- Remodeling the jail, including the infrastructure systems, will be costly and will have limitations due to the existing footprint
- There would be no ability to control the amount and types of services offered to the inmate population when housed out of county
- More inmates would be housed away from their families and local community
- Estimated total 30-year cost: \$536 million (This is projected to be the highest total cost and property tax levy cost option)
- Capital Construction: \$2.3 million (included in total 30-year cost)
- Only funding option is the property tax levy

Option 4 Expand the Existing Facility

Expand the capacity of the existing jail, potentially in phases, to the 2052 projected bed space need

Key Considerations:

- Additional capacity will greatly reduce the number of inmates that would be housed out of county, which would reduce the required amount of transportation staff and equipment
- Safety concerns for staff and inmates would be addressed, reducing potential liability
- Needed training space for staff and services space for inmates would be addressed
- More local tax dollars would stay in Beltrami County
- Capital costs would be expensive
- An expansion may be constructed across the street from the current jail, creating operational challenges due to multiple buildings and additional staff requirements
- Expanding/remodeling the jail, including the infrastructure systems, will be costly and will have limitations due to tying into an existing system
- Estimated total 30-year cost: \$439 million
- Capital Construction: \$29.5 million (included in total 30-year cost)
- An estimated \$62.5 million could be funded by a local option sales tax
- Remaining projected property tax levy over 30 years is \$377 million

Option 5 Build a New Facility

Vacate the current jail and build a new facility. A potential site for a new facility is unknown at this time.

Key Considerations:

- A new facility will greatly reduce the number of inmates that would be housed out of county, which would reduce the required amount of transportation staff and equipment
- The design and operations would be tailored to the operational philosophy and address the specific health, safety, and cultural needs of the inmate population, including an assessment/booking center

- Needed training space for staff and services space for inmates would be addressed
- More local tax dollars would stay in Beltrami County
- Capital costs would be expensive
- A new jail would likely not be adjacent to the courthouse unless the current facility is demolished and a new one built on the same site
- Estimated total 30-year cost: \$500 million
- Capital Construction: \$74.8 million (included in total 30-year cost)
- An estimated \$125 million could be funded by a local option sales tax
- Remaining projected property tax levy over 30 years is \$375 million

Option 6 Build a Regional Facility

Vacate the current jail and build a new regional facility which would involve housing inmates of a least one other jurisdiction.

Key Considerations:

- Capital and operating costs would be shared or offset by other jurisdictions
- Depending upon the organizational structuring, guaranteed revenue could be generated for a contracted period of time
- Greater numbers of inmates and resources may increase opportunities for the provision of relevant inmate services
- A new site would likely be required which may not be adjacent to the courthouse

- There would be additional court transportation needs
- No current arrangements are in place with other jurisdictions for participation
- Studies would have to be conducted to determine the capacity needed for all participating jurisdictions
- There is not enough information at this point for a valid rating of this alternative
- Estimated total 30-year cost: \$532 million
- Capital Construction: \$93.2 million (included in total 30-year cost)
- An estimated \$150 million could be funded by a local option sales tax
- Remaining projected property tax levy over 30 years is \$382 million

Option 7 Close the Current Facility

- Close the Beltrami County Detention Jail altogether
- The County may choose to operate a booking center in Bemidji to process new arrestees and if they are unable to post bond within a short period of time (4 hours typically) they would be transported to jails in other jurisdictions to be housed

Key Considerations:

- Capital construction costs for expanding or replacing the jail would be avoided
- A small number of inmates would be held for a few hours instead of housed which would reduce the burden on the current infrastructure systems
- Fewer detention officers would be needed for a booking center rather

- than a full-service jail
- Most of the inmate population must be transported to other jurisdictions, leading to the need for additional transportation staff and vehicles
- Increased safety risk and liability to Sheriff & County during transports.
- Would still pay to operate a booking center
- The costs for housing out inmates will continue to increase
- A greater amount of local tax dollars will be spent out of county
- Even with the reduced burden, the infrastructure systems will remain expensive to maintain
- There would be no ability to control the amount and types of services offered to the inmate population
- Inmates would be housed away from their families and local community
- Estimated total 30-year cost: \$475 million
- Capital Construction: \$1.5 million (included in total 30-year cost)
- Only funding option is the property tax levy

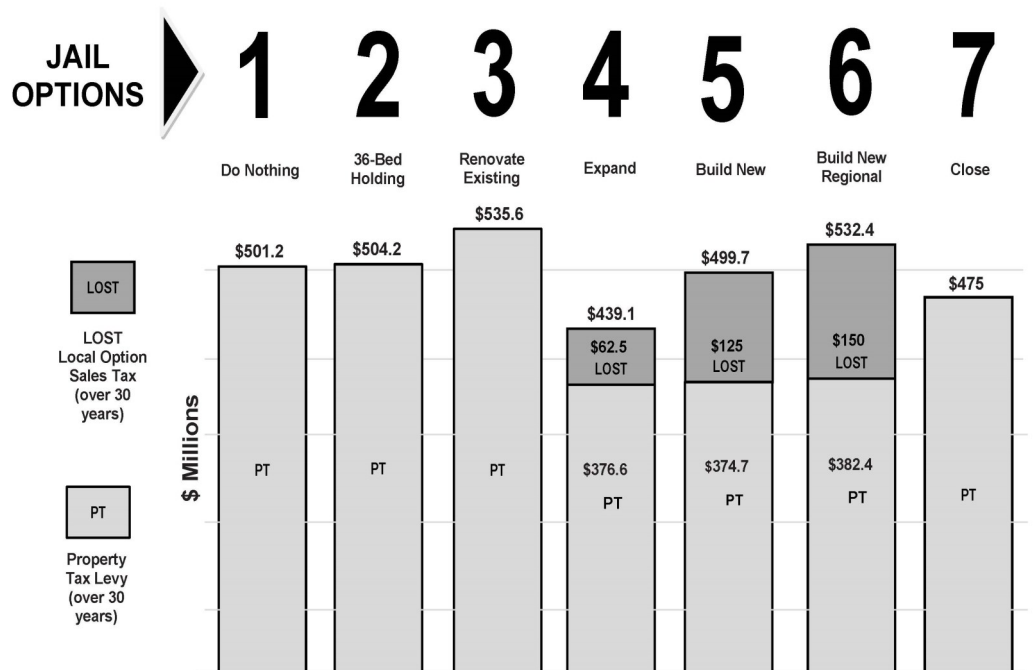
Costs and Financing Options

Beltrami County engaged Justice Planners to conduct a study to identify its criminal justice system and Jail needs. Justice Planners provided a detailed report on seven options: Status Quo, 36-Hour Holding, Renovate, Expand, Build New, Regional Facility, and Close the Facility. Justice Planners detailed the advantages/disadvantages, and calculated the 30-year costs associated with each option.

The Jail population is comprised of about 65% of County residents and 35% of non-county residents (those living outside of the County). There are two primary funding sources being considered to finance the Jail Project: 1) property taxes and 2) sales taxes.

Funding provided by PROPERTY TAXES comes from an assessment on every taxable parcel of land within the County. This source of funding would place the entire financial burden locally on all property tax payers.

Funding provided by SALES TAXES comes from a variety of residential and non-residential tax payers. It is estimated that about 60% of all sales taxes collected by the County are paid by local residents of the County. This means that the remaining 40% of sales tax collections would be paid by non-residents. Additionally, staples such as food and clothing are exempt from sales tax collections. Note: MN Statute 297A.99 Subd. 1a. only allows sales tax revenues to be used for the construction and rehabilitation of capital projects.



Learn More....Get Involved!

Attend a meeting!



Public Comments will be heard and accepted during all of the following meetings:

September 8, 2022—Kelliher Community Center—5:00 pm

September 13, 2022—Beltrami County Board Room, County Administration Building—5:00 pm

September 22, 2022—PUBLIC HEARING—5:00 pm

**Beltrami County Board Room,
County Administration Building**

Take the Survey!



Beltrami County Jail Project Community Feedback Survey

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BeltramiCountyJail>

Tell Us What You Think...

In an effort to keep the community up-to-date on the activities regarding the Jail Project, the County developed a special section on the website:

https://www.co.beltrami.mn.us/Departments/Law%20enforcement/Jail_Project.html.

The Jail Project pages provide all kinds of background, information, reports, meeting agendas and minutes, news and information, etc. about the project. It also contains a link to provide public comments and take the community survey:

<https://www.co.beltrami.mn.us/Jailprojectportal.html>.

Survey will be open between August 25 and September 21

Oversite and Recommending Committees

While the County Board will be the ultimate decision-maker regarding how the Jail Project proceeds, the Board developed a governance structure to lead and oversee the progression of the Jail Project. The Board established a Steering Committee and three advisory Sub-Committees. The three advisory Sub-Committees report to the Steering Committee which finalizes recommendations and reports to the Board. Each committee is comprised of a mix of staff, elected officials, community members, and specialists. A brief overview of each committee follows:

Steering Committee

The scope of the Steering Committee is to:

- Review information and Sub-committee recommendations
- Coordinate the work of Sub-Committees
- Direct the Project Consultant
- Make final recommendations to the County Board
- Ensure timely progress of the project

Finance Sub-Committee

The scope of the Finance Sub-Committee is to:

- Identify, develop, review & coordinate all work within the committee's purview including identification of costs financial modeling & options, and research and implementation of public financing instruments
- Provide guidance, direction and support to staff
- Make recommendations to the Steering Committee

Design & Operations Sub-Committee

The scope of the Design & Operations Sub-Committee is to:

- Identify, develop, review, coordinate all work within the Committee's purview including concept and final design aspects of the facility as well as commissioning, outfitting, transition and operational logistics in opening and operating a new facility
- Provide guidance, direction and support to the design & operations staff
- Make recommendations to the Steering Committee

Programming Sub-Committee

The scope of the Programming Sub-committee is to:

- Identify, develop, review, coordinate all work within the Committee's purview including analyzing program needs & caps and developing goals, objectives and improvements for new or existing programs
- Provide guidance, direction & support to programming staff
- Make recommendations to the Steering Committee

Reducing Recidivism

Among the many challenges the current Jail poses, lack of programming and reintegration space limits the County's ability to provide services aimed at reducing recidivism and lowering the jail population. The Programming Sub-Committee has been studying this issue for some time.

The Committee has met a number of times to discuss the programming needs for inmates who are being housed at the Beltrami County Jail. It is certainly no secret that many of the inmates housed within the jail suffer from addiction to chemicals, difficulties in managing mental health needs, as well as a lack of sufficient re-entry services when they transition from the jail back into our community. Re-entry services might include employment, education, housing, transportation as well as connection to community-based services to address their addiction, mental health and other social service needs. The importance of connecting inmates to rehabilitative services during their incarceration and prior to release cannot be overstated. The best approach to impact behavioral change is to intervene early and provide support while inmates are incarcerated with a continuation of services in the community upon release. Justice Planners has noted in their study that 57% of the local jail population has a chemical health need. Justice Planners also acknowledged this statistic is likely 10-15% higher due to under reporting which puts this population closer to the 70% mark.

The Program Committee recognized and acknowledged the elevated numbers of American Indian inmates housed within the Beltrami County Jail. As such, it is important to deliver services and/or programs in a culturally informed manner. Space to allow cultural activities and practices to occur is not available within the current jail structure. Connecting inmates to their culture can play a key role in an inmate's successful reintegration back into the community and lead to reductions in recidivism.

The Program Committee also recognized the need for a multi-use space within the jail where the above-mentioned services/programs could be provided. Currently, there is a lack of sufficient space for inmate services such as education, rehabilitation, cultural practices and spiritual services within the jail with no dedicated program space at this time. Professionals, such as attorneys and probation officers, needing to meet with inmates struggle to share the limited space available to meet with their clients. Treatment providers also struggle to secure space to conduct treatment related activities such as chemical use and mental health assessments.

If Beltrami County were to expand or build a new jail, the programming needs for inmates housed within either of these new settings could be significantly improved. Services and/or programming to address addiction and mental health could be expanded, educational and employment related programming could be implemented along with cultural and spiritual activities as well. The overall goal in offering services/programming is to provide inmates with the necessary resources to transition back into our community and live law abiding, productive, healthy lives. If this goal is met, we have an opportunity to impact recidivism with this population and improve public safety.

~Submitted by: Trisha Hansen, DOC District Supervisor