

Industry Experts Validate Cost Savings Potential of New “Transition Center”

Legislature asked to support ‘Project Definition’ phase before decision on jail construction can be made

Poughkeepsie, NY... The Dutchess County Legislature hosted a “Committee of the Whole” meeting yesterday to hear a presentation from RicciGreene Associates, a nationally recognized planning and design firm specializing in criminal justice projects, contracted to conduct a validation study of the Dutchess County Criminal Justice Council’s (CJC) *Criminal Justice System Needs Assessment* report. RicciGreene Associates concurred with the underlying assumptions and analyses used in the CJC’s report and the recommendation for the construction of a new, larger jail facility to address the long term issue of housing out inmates. A new “transition center” facility is expected to provide millions of dollars in short-term and long-term savings to the County, while also enabling the County to expand its nationally-recognized Alternative to Incarceration programs to better transition inmates back into the community and decrease potential recidivism.

Dutchess County Executive Marcus J. Molinaro said, “The housing out situation is a long term problem that must be addressed. This has been a priority for me since I took office as County Executive. I asked the CJC to look at this issue comprehensively and provide recommendations. I am grateful to all of the CJC members for their thoughtful work and effort, which has now been validated by industry experts. We are pleased with the progress so far, but now is the time to take the next step.”

“We have a clearly defined problem within our system. We do not have the capacity to house our inmate population,” continued Molinaro. “More than 200 individuals must be transported to other county facilities to be housed every day, costing taxpayers millions of dollars. We must move forward to address this issue. That next step is the “Project Definition” phase, answering several critical questions before any final decision can be made to build a new facility.”

RicciGreene Associates provides two different site scenarios for a new transition center – building a new facility on the current jail site at North Hamilton Street in the City of Poughkeepsie or new construction on the Hudson River Psychiatric Center property off of Rt. 9G in the Town of Poughkeepsie. Both scenarios include general, conceptual ideas for each site which would allow the County to have sufficient housing space for its inmates and provide greater opportunity to address the behavioral and criminogenic issues with expanded evidence-based programming and services as well as housing units necessary to serve various special needs populations within the criminal justice system.

Although Dutchess County has extensive and successful Alternative to Incarceration programs serving more than 600 individuals on a daily basis and its incarceration rate is well below the national average, the Average Daily Population (ADP) for the Dutchess County Jail was 480 inmates in 2012. The functional capacity of the current jail facility is 257 inmates, resulting in the need to “house out” on average as many as 200 or more inmates in other facilities each day. The cost to house out inmates has grown to more than \$8 million dollars annually and continues to rise. Housing out inmates is problematic because these individuals are separated from legal counsel, family and community support systems, as well as programming opportunities to help them end the cycle of recidivism. Housing out inmates slows down the processing of cases through the courts, since it is more difficult for attorneys to spend time with their clients, for mental health professionals to assist in locating alternative programs and for probation officers to provide necessary pre-sentencing updates and reports to the court. As a result, these logistical challenges of housing out inmates contribute to an increase in the Average Length of Stay (ALOS), which

in turn contributes to a higher ADP. ALOS is up 25% since 2007, coincident with the increased number of inmates housed out.

Dutchess County Sheriff Adrian “Butch” Anderson said, “Our current jail facility has insufficient capacity and we are putting our officers at increased safety risk each and every day that we continue to house out inmates. We are finally moving in the right direction to address this long standing issue. County Executive Molinaro is pursuing a thorough and deliberate process that will ensure the final outcome is the best decision for our community.”

Dutchess County District Attorney William Grady said, “We have a well functioning criminal justice system in Dutchess County with all segments working together effectively. Yet one of the main components is broken. Our jail cannot meet the current needs and requirements of the system. For example, the housing out policy slows down the justice process and this cannot be accepted any longer. The role of the District Attorney’s Office is to prosecute and enforce our laws; this work cannot be hampered by an unsustainable housing out policy.”

The current jail facility is costly to maintain and operate, particularly the original 1984 section of the building which requires numerous upgrades including sprinkler systems and equipment replacement. This original section makes the jail facility highly staff intensive, with a 1 to 1.3 staff to inmate ratio among the highest in New York State. There is also limited opportunity to provide programs and services at the current facility, particularly for special population needs such as women, juvenile offenders and those with mental health issues.

A new facility, envisioned as a transitional center, would enable the County to provide various co-located services to support a strong continuum of services that embrace the County’s philosophy of least restrictive, evidence-based criminal justice practices that help drive down the recidivism rate. Using new design concepts, the County could also improve its staff to inmate ratio to potentially about 1 to 3, which has been achieved in other facilities throughout New York State.

RicciGreene Associates recommends a design capacity of up to 625 inmates for a new transition center facility, based on its population projections and other key factors. Both of the sites proposed could be designed to accommodate a new, modern facility with comparable total project cost ranges between \$150 - \$200 million. The use of temporary housing PODs would be possible under both scenarios and would enable the County to return its inmates to Dutchess County immediately and achieve short term savings of over \$2 million annually.

“The CJC has identified, and industry experts have concurred, that there is an opportunity to control rising costs with a transition center facility that takes advantage of modern design concepts and would enable us to dramatically decrease staffing needs. We already know that the cost to bond a new construction project would be lower than what we currently pay to house out all of these inmates. The Project Definition phase will allow us to quantify specific ratios and fully quantify long term savings potential,” said County Executive Molinaro.

RicciGreene Associates recommends the County begin the next phase – Project Definition - and undertake comprehensive needs assessments to create detailed technical and design studies to provide County leaders with more information on schedule, phasing, environmental and cost issues for each site options. Seven key questions need to be addressed and answered before county leaders can make any final decision about the site and construction of a new facility. Those questions include:

1. How will the new jail and campus work?
 - Operational narrative
 - Security narrative
 - Materials, systems, technology

2. How big will the new Jail be?
 - Detailed list of spaces

- Stacking and blocking
 - Departmental floor plans
3. Where will the new jail be located?
 - Finalize site studies
 - Permits
 4. What will the new jail look like?
 - Preliminary sketches and views
 - Show roof line, materials and character
 5. How much will the new jail cost?
 - Finish schedule
 - Detailed cost estimate
 6. When will the new jail open?
 - Schedule
 - Phasing (if applicable)
 7. What will happen to the old jail?

The bond resolution that the County Legislature will consider is to fund that Project Definition phase and answer those questions. If approved, the County will begin the process of answering those key questions. During this phase, there will be significant community outreach to gather public input and keeping the public apprised of the status of the project. The Dutchess County Legislature will consider the bond resolution at its June 6th Public Safety Committee meeting. If approved by the Public Safety Committee, the bond resolution will be voted on by the full Legislature at the June 10th board meeting.

“We are not requesting to build now. We must undergo a deliberate and prudent evaluation of what could be next. We will continue to seek public input and feedback to ensure the process remains imbedded with our key decision making principles of focus, logic, inclusion and fairness. However, it is time for a solution and we must keep the process moving forward to best serve the needs of our criminal justice system and those of our taxpayers,” concluded County Executive Molinaro.

RicciGreene Associates Validation Study of the Dutchess County Criminal Justice System Needs Assessment can be found online

at: <http://www.co.dutchess.ny.us/CountyGov/Departments/CriminalJusticeCouncil/CJValidationStudyofNeedsAssessment.pdf>. To see the webcast recording of the Committee of the Whole presentation, go to <http://www.totalwebcasting.com/view/?id=dutchess> and select the May 28th Committee of the Whole meeting.

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