



ELEVATUS ARCHITECTURE

January 27, 2025

Dear commissioners,

I am writing this letter to address the concerns that were raised regarding the viability of renovating the existing Walsh County Jail. As a way of introduction, I am a registered architect that has been practicing since 1980. Of my 46 years of architectural practice, 40 of those years have been designing county jails and state and federal prisons across the United States. I have designed a multitude of brand-new jail facilities and have also designed several projects that involved major renovations and additions to existing jails.

Given their nature, county jails since the beginning of time have been built to hold the worst of prisoners, thus they are constructed for maximum security of heavy gage materials such as steel, reinforced concrete and reinforced concrete masonry. The decision to renovate and/or add onto an existing facility must be made with a multitude of factors taken into account, such as:

1. Is the site large enough to accommodate an addition that yields an efficiently laid out facility?
2. Will the inmates have to be transported to another county jail for the duration of the renovation due to the extent of repairs and renovation required to bring the existing portion of the jail up to code? This could be anywhere from 18-24 months.
3. Staffing costs are forever; will the layout be optimally efficient or will the compromised layout be staffing inefficient for the life of the facility, thus costing the taxpayers more for staffing costs than an optimal layout?
4. Will the cost to renovate the existing part of the jail be exorbitant due to the hardness of the existing structure? If you must tear out concrete slabs to replace under-slab piping and the majority of the reinforced walls, is it cost effective compared to building new?
5. Will the layout on the existing site accommodate future additions for continued county growth 10, 20, 30 years hence?

Analyzing the existing building and site plan, it appears that the existing jail is hemmed in on 3 sides: the EOC approximately 25' to the east, the sidewalk/property line approximately 30' to the south (E 7th Street), and the sidewalk/property line approximately 10' to the west (Cooper Avenue). To the north it is approximately 15' to the driveway. This site, including renovating the entire existing jail facility, yields approximately 20,100 SF.

The program requirements for the new 46 bed jail facility mandate approximately 31,600 SF of space to meet all the requirements of the American Correctional Association Standards and the North Dakota Correctional Facility Standards and the requirements of the Walsh County Jail administration. Thus, this site is over 11,000 SF short of meeting the program.

A 2-story housing unit is not operationally feasible for 46 beds that need to be subdivided into a minimum of 8 classifications. Thus, this is a one-story structure, whether new or renovated and added onto.

Adding a 2nd floor to an existing building that was not originally structurally designed to take a 2nd floor is possible but not cost effective. Basically, a superstructure over the top of the existing building would be required, a very expensive proposition.

In answer to the 5 earlier points:

1. The existing building is NOT placed on the site and is not laid out in such a manner that it can be easily added onto and end up with an efficient layout. The main goal in any jail design is optimal layout for maximum staff efficiency. A poorly laid-out jail requires more staff, which is a “forever” additional cost to the county. This building does not facilitate an efficient renovation/addition.
2. The condition of the existing jail is beyond bad. The majority of the underground piping is deteriorating, collapsing, and beyond repair. The laundry is unusable. The slab will require demolition, most of the hardened walls within the housing area will have to be demolished. The inmates will definitely have to be transported for the duration of demolition and construction, which will be very costly to the county.
3. Again, the end result will be a very compromised layout, one that is very inefficient to operate for the staff.
4. Again, the cost to demolish and reconstruct will most likely be higher than building new.
5. Again, the existing site is not large enough to accommodate the new jail, let alone large enough for future additions as the county needs grow.

In short, the new construction that has been proposed is the best in the long term for the taxpayers of Walsh County.

Sincerely, Dave Sholl