



Posted on Thu, May. 29, 2008

Johnson County jail expansion will save taxpayers money

By FINN BULLERS
The Kansas City Star

Johnson County commissioners approved a plan Thursday that officials say could save taxpayers more than \$8 million in detention costs over the next three years.

By the fall of next year, Johnson County's new 128-bed jail expansion near Gardner is expected to open its doors, creating much-needed inmate space in a county growing by more than 10,000 residents a year.

The idea, supported unanimously by county commissioners, is to move county deputies and the inmates they supervise at the Olathe Adult Detention Center in downtown Olathe to the new jail expansion.

That keeps costs down on what now is projected to be a \$24.2 million remake of the Olathe detention center.

The 18-month project will create a centrally located booking center in Olathe where police officers throughout the county can drop off inmates for faster processing.

And with the inmates gone from the downtown jail, the county can save 30 percent of the project cost because remodelers will no longer have to work in a secure facility, said Joe Waters, the county's director of facilities.

Delaying the cost of hiring new deputies to staff the Gardner jail expansion, he said, will provide the bulk of the savings — \$1.4 million this year, \$4.5 million next year and \$2 million in 2010.

Energy savings of \$228,000 are also expected. The project is expected to be completed by mid-year 2012.

"When you talk about win-win situations, this is what we're talking about," Waters said in an interview Thursday.

The idea first surfaced in a consultant's report three years ago and caught fire last year when projections showed the cost savings to be "significant," said Sarah Plinsky, a budget analyst in the county manager's office.

The downtown Olathe site will no longer be a jail but will become a 72-hour intake center to process offenders before they are bused to the county jail at the New Century AirCenter near Gardner.

Suspects held for 72 hours or less need less space and fewer amenities, not an actual jail bed.

That could increase intake capacity by 108 spaces without adding any operating costs, a consultant's study shows. The county pays more than \$100 a day to house inmates in other jails.

Those 108 offenders can now be housed in Johnson County for \$37 a day.

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