

continued from page 1

budgeting for a deteriorating jail that needs infrastructure updates.

Sheriff Lee Price, who is retiring at the end of this year, reminded the Legislature that an addition of 30 beds at the jail in 2014 was a temporary measure and can be taken away at any time by the DOCCS, which would cause further problems of overcrowding.

Briggs stressed that the financial information needs to be public before the project goes through. She referred to the ash for trash project, first started in 2013, which she said is "dormant" because financials are now being questioned after money was spent on the State Environmental Quality Review process.

City resident Meathild Nagel said at the start of legislative session that she is concerned that the county is looking to finance a new jail when legislators should instead be studying ways to reduce the jail population.

"I believe financing a new jail

is a bad idea," Nagel, a SUNY Cortland philosophy professor, said. "Alternatives to incarceration and crime prevention programs can greatly reduce the need for jail cells."

The Cortland County Jail was built in 1990 as a 50-bed facility, which is now deemed inadequate, given the increasing number of prisoners, averaging over 90 inmates each day.

A 19-page report released Aug. 12 by a county advisory group found that a new public safety complex is needed due to inefficiencies at the 25-year-old jail.

The report can be found on the county Legislature's website at www.cortland-co.org/Legislature/ and copies will be available for public review at the Legislature Clerk's Office on the third floor of the Cortland County Office Building in Room 316.

Residents can email questions to Jeremy Boylan, clerk of the Legislature, at pubsafetycomplex@cortland-co.org or call Capt. Budd Riggs at 607-758-5599, ext. 161.

First phase of jail study passes

8-28-15

By COLLEEN SHUZDAK
Staff Reporter

csuzdak@cortlandstandardnews.net

CORTLAND — The Cortland County Legislature Thursday night approved the first phase of work required to build a new \$38.5 million public safety building: hiring an engineer to start pre-architectural work and do site evaluations.

The vote was 13 to 3 with Legislators Susan Briggs (R-Cortlandville), Luke Synder (I-LD5) and Amy Cobb (D-LD2) opposed. Legislator Joe Steinhoff (R-Cortlandville) was absent and unable to vote.

The county is hiring Latham-based SMRT Architects & Engineers at a cost of \$149,881 to conduct pre-architectural planning and site assessment. SMRT also designed the St. Lawrence County Correctional Facility.

The money will come from the county's reserve account for the 2015 budget.

Briggs said during legislative session she was "a little concerned" that other legislators had not questioned how the county is going to pay for a new facility, although she agrees that a new county jail must be considered.

"I think the taxpayers of this county have the right to know what we are thinking," Briggs said of financing the nearly \$40 million jail project. She also said she would like to hear more public input on the project.

County budget and jail officials have said that without identifying a site for the new facility, the project may never proceed. The first phase will provide the county up to six sites to present to the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, which must first approve any site.

Peggy Mousaw, Director of Budget and Finance, responded to Briggs' concerns during the meeting, noting that state approval is needed before anything can progress and a study needs to be done before budgeting for a new jail.

"Until we have their agreement, we have nothing," Mousaw said. "It's not just funding the cost but looking at expenses that are going out the door."

Mousaw referred to the high costs attached to boarding out inmates, including overtime and transportation expenses. She said she needs a clearer picture of how to budget for the cost of a new jail as she prepares for the 2016 budget, adding there is a three-year gap from start to finish of designing and building a new jail. If the Legislature cannot find an agreeable site, Mousaw has to continue

See JAIL, page 2

New jail could house federal inmate

9-2-15

By COLLEEN SUZDAK

Staff Reporter

csuzdak@courlandstandarnews.net

The Cortland County Legislature's consideration of a plan to build a public safety complex has also stirred discussion about possibly housing federal inmates, which legislators say is a concern of their constituents.

County law enforcement, budget, and jail officials have pleaded for a new and bigger public safety complex, which would decrease the need to board out inmates at other jails—a costly burden. This year's boarding costs total about \$400,000 not including overtime and transportation.

Housing federal inmates could generate revenue to the department if a new jail is constructed.

The recommendation to build a new public safety complex came out on

Aug. 12 after a county advisory group released a report deeming it the best option to address overcrowding at the jail.

Capt. Rob Derksen of the Cortland County Sheriff's Department said Tuesday morning that the advisory group also explored the possibility of housing federal inmates because the United States Marshals pay more than county sheriff departments.

The county Sheriff's Department pays \$80 per inmate each day an inmate is boarded out.

Derksen added that if the new Cortland County public safety building was to hold federal inmates, it would only be for a short time and he does not expect the move would draw families of inmates to the county.

"It would be during the judicial process," Derksen said. He added that many federal courts are located close to

the county jail such as ones in Syracuse, Utica and Binghamton. "It's not going to be for sentenced inmates."

Concern about housing federal inmates surfaced during the county Legislature's Democratic caucus Thursday with legislators demanding answers for their constituents who had expressed concerns.

Some legislators said taxpayers were questioning whether housing federal inmates would bring more families to the county and possibly place a bigger burden on the welfare system.

Legislator Raylynn Knolls (D-LD7) said Tuesday afternoon that residents may not understand what the new public safety complex might entail, noting the county jail will not operate like a state prison — which houses inmates for longer sentences.

Knolls said she wants residents to know that while housing federal inmates is being considered, it should not impact other county departments.

"If it's on a short-term basis, then I'm OK with that," she said. "If they (federal inmates) are only here for a short-term basis, there would be no reason for their family members to move here."

Knolls also stressed that the Legislature has not approved building a new jail. Phase One of the project was approved this month by the Legislature, allowing for site locations to be evaluated to determine if the project can proceed.

Ultimate approval of a location will come from the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, she said.

Lt. Thomas Mulheron of the

Seneca County Correctional Institute said Tuesday afternoon the concept federal inmates for each inmate, through a facility with the United States Marshals in Rochester and Syracuse Districts.

Mulheron added that the state does not cover any of the costs but rather reimburse Seneca County for related transportation mileage.

The Seneca County facility has 120 inmates.

The Broome County Correctional Institute, which can hold up to 100 inmates, also houses federal inmates for each inmate, Broome County Sheriff David Harder said Tuesday

continued from page 1

2016 budget process without the Legislature committing to Phase 1," the report states. "The county will be forced to budget for failing infrastructure versus a sustainable long-term solution."

Rigg, also a member of the advisory group, said the report outlines alternatives that would only put another temporary fix on the problem, such as last year's conversion of the gymnasium for space for 30 additional beds.

Alternatives the group considered include adding a second story to the existing jail, portable pod units stationed in the parking lot to house inmates, purchasing surrounding properties to expand on the existing jail, and using a regional facility.

These options were proven to be ineffective, according to the group's report, because of high overtime and transportation costs and increased maintenance of an already deteriorating facility.



Bob Ellis/staff photographer
The bunk area of the Cortland County jail is seen April 2014.

"We're looking at every option and everything comes back to a new public safety complex," Rigg said. "We're going to try and consolidate as many services as we can for the long haul."

The report details the background of the jail, citing the problem of overcrowding which has been studied since 2004, including a state comptroller's report, also in 2004, that found

the jail to be inefficient.

According to the advisory group report, the continuous need to board out inmates is costly for the county and presents a fiscal constraint for the department's budget each year.

The county spent \$2.2 million in boarding out inmates from 2010 until July 2015. Last year, \$456,372 was spent on those costs. Last year, the state Commis-

sion of Corrections approved a 30-bed addition contingent upon the county pursuing a new facility. The county also had to hire four additional full-time corrections officers for the addition.

"We're pretty serious and we're trying to cover all the bases," Rigg said. "There's going to be a little bit of a shock factor because, unfortunately, jails and public safety complexes are not cheap."

Rigg said the group has considered some sites for the new public safety complex but he would not identify them.

Other advisory group members include Capt. Rob Derksen of the Sheriff's Department; Scott Roman, county director of Emergency Response and Communications; county Director of Budget and Finance Peggy Mousaw; Legislature Chair Don Boyden (R-Preble, Scott and Homer); Legislators Dick Bushnell (D-LD4) and Kevin Whitney (R-Cortlandville); Jeremy Boylan, clerk of the Legislature, and County Attorney Karen Howe.

Advisory group should be hired for county jail

2-13-15

By COLLEEN SUZDAK
Staff Reporter

csuzdak@courtlandstandardnews.net

CORTLAND — A Cortland County advisory group that evaluated the feasibility of building a county jail will recommend next month that the county hire a Latham-based architect at a cost of almost \$150,000 as the first phase of the architectural and engineering services, expected to total \$3.2 million.

The advisory group's recommendation and findings were expected to be discussed late this morning during a Judiciary and Public Safety Committee meeting.

The total cost of the project is expected to be \$38 million, including the \$3.2 million in design costs.

Members of the group, comprising county officials, agreed in a document released Wednesday afternoon that a \$38 million public safety complex is needed to replace the inefficient design and poor structure of the current jail. SMRT Architects & Engineers, also the designers of the St. Lawrence Correctional Facility, is the recommended architect.

The Cortland County jail was built in 1990 as a 50-bed facility which is now deemed inadequate, given the rising population of the jail, averaging over 90 inmates each day.

The first phase is expected to cost \$149,881, which includes pre-architectural planning and site assessment. This cost is part of the \$3.2 million project

Kevin Conlon
Managing Editor
news@cortlandstandard.net

Friday
August 14, 2015
Page 3

County committee advances jail project

Proposal to hire engineering firm endorsed

By COLLEEN SIUZDAK
Staff Reporter

csiuzdak@cortlandstandardnews.net

The proposed new public safety/jail complex has taken a step forward now that the Cortland County Legislature's Judiciary and Public Safety Committee unanimously endorsed a resolution to hire an engineering firm for almost \$150,000.

A 19-page report released Wednesday by a county advisory group found that a new public safety complex, which would cost the county about \$38.5 million, is needed due to inefficiencies of 25-year-old current jail that could cause problems for the county in future years.

The first phase will cost \$149,881, which includes pre-architectural planning and site assessment. This will be taken out of the county's reserve account for the 2015 budget.

Committee members agreed Thursday morning that a \$38.5 million complex is needed to replace the inefficient design and poor structure of the current jail. SMRT Architects & Engineers, also the designers of the St. Lawrence Correctional Facility, is the recommended architect.

Committee Vice Chair Kevin Whitney said during the meeting Thursday that the first phase is needed to find out more information about the project and give that information to the public.

Budget and Finance Committee scheduled to meet Wednesday morning.

The resolution to hire the firm was expected to be voted on by legislators next month but Legislator Joe Steinhoff (R-Cortlandville) wanted to move the vote to this month so the public will know more about the project. He added that the overcrowding issue at the jail needs to be dealt with.

"I just want to get our wheels turning here," Steinhoff said.

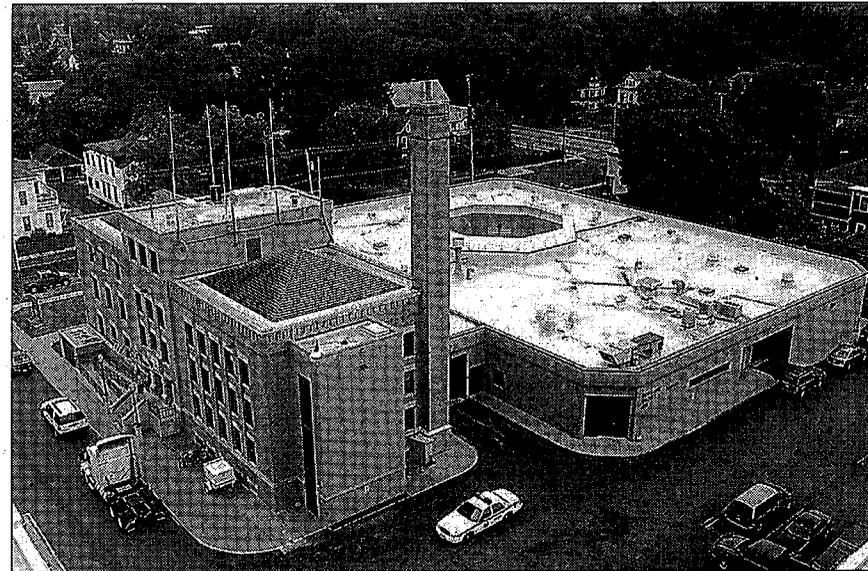
Funding for a new facility has been a thorn in the Legislature's side for over 10 years, as lawmakers have been hesitant to spend millions of dollars on the project.

Director of Budget and Finance Peggy Mousaw said during the meeting the first phase will allow the county to assess how it would pay for the project.

Mousaw said after the meeting that a way to finance the entire project cannot be determined until phase one is completed and a site has been chosen.

"If we go and find out that we don't have a valuable piece of land, that means we're just going to budget for a deteriorating infrastructure," Mousaw said, adding that consolidated services can also help reduce costs. "We need to know which way we're going to budget."

With a new public safety complex, the county would also save on high expenses in boarding out inmates, such as overtime and transportation costs and



Bob Ellis/staff photographer

The Cortland County Public Safety Building, left, is located adjacent to the Cortland County jail, right. The 50-bed jail, built in 1990, is now deemed inadequate because the county now averages more than 90 inmates daily. A report released Wednesday by a county advisory group estimates a new public safety complex would cost about \$38.5 million.

Mousaw said.

By consolidating the city police department and the county sheriff's department and office of emergency response, the county would be able to apply to the state Department of Homeland Security for possible grant funding, an option the county does not have with the current jail, Mousaw explained.

The county also faces a problem complying with state Department of Corrections regulations.

Sheriff Lee Price, who is retiring at the end of this year, has lobbied for a new jail for over 10 years, also citing the inefficiencies of the jail and pleading with the Legislature to take a look at the overcrowding in the jail.

"I realize it's an expensive project but it's time to start building toward the future," Price said.

Some legislators were concerned that residents would not have enough time to give their input if the Legislature

"If we go and find out that we don't have a valuable piece of land, that means we're just going to budget for a deteriorating infrastructure. We need to know which way we're going to budget."

— Peggy Mousaw,
Cortland County director of budget
and finance

over 90 inmates each day.

Alternatives the advisory group considered include adding a second story to the existing jail, adding portable pod units in the parking lot to house inmates, purchasing surrounding properties to expand on the existing jail, and using a regional facility. The group found these options to be ineffective.

The report can be found on the county Legislature's website at www.cortland-co.org/Legislature/ and copies will be available for the public for review at the Legislature Clerk's Office on the third floor of the Cortland County Office Building in Room 316.