

MENDOCINO COUNTY JAIL

SUMMARY

The current County jail facilities have served Mendocino County since 1985 and are in need of major renovations. The jail campus has a history of long-standing deferred maintenance. Failure to address these repairs will increase costs and continue to expose the County to potential liabilities.

The 2021-22 Mendocino County Grand Jury (GJ) focused on two serious maintenance issues within the jail campus which need immediate attention. The GJ observed uneven broken sidewalks which are unsafe for both correctional staff and inmates. There is also a vacant, dilapidated prefabricated structure which warrants removal as it presents a serious liability to the County.

Staff shortages within the Fleet and Facilities Department (FFD) have contributed to the deferred maintenance of the jail. In the past, a maintenance worker has been assigned to the jail, however, this is no longer the case due to staff shortages.

Staff shortages for Correctional Officers (COs) are an ongoing concern. Low wages and lack of available housing are contributing factors. This continues to present major problems for the recruitment and retention of COs. Developing competitive incentives will alleviate a portion of these problems.

BACKGROUND

The Mendocino County Jail was built in 1985 and projected to have a 15-year lifespan. Now, 36 years later, it remains in use at near capacity with ongoing and serious maintenance issues and staff shortages which have not been adequately addressed. Deferred maintenance is a long-time problem that was brought before the public in three prior GJ reports in 1999-00, 2004-05 and 2005-06.

METHODOLOGY

The GJ interviewed members of the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors (BOS), jail staff command, FFD personnel and a member of a private foundation which supports law enforcement. The GJ also attended Community Correctional Partnership (CCP) meetings and performed a limited site visit to the County jail campus. The Grand Jury reviewed the following documents:

- State of California Report titled, Biennial Inspection of Mendocino County Adult Detention Facility and Court Holding Facility Penal Code 6031 report dated May 6, 2020,
- Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the County of Mendocino and Mendocino County Deputy Sheriff's Association,

- California Legislation Assembly Bill 109 titled Realignment in California (AB109),
- Mendocino County Fleet and Facilities Department, 72 Open Work Orders dated January 6, 2020,
- Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) 1990,
- Schematic drawing of new jail annex scheduled for ground-breaking in 2024,
- The BOS Special Meeting, Consent Calendar (3a) General Services Agency, dated March 21, 2022,
- Monthly CEO Report-Outs.

DISCUSSION OF FACTS

Maintenance

The GJ performed a limited site visit to the jail campus focusing on sidewalk damages in multiple areas. The GJ investigation indicated both correctional staff and inmates have tripped over these uneven sidewalks. These are ADA violations and potential liabilities for the County.

On August 26, 2019, jail staff submitted a work order to the FFD requesting repairs to the uneven and dangerous sidewalks. A second work order was submitted on June 17, 2020, for the same repairs. This work order was sent out for bid; however, no work has been done and the hazards remain. On March 21, 2022, the BOS, at a Special Meeting, authorized \$25 thousand for FFD to repair damaged sidewalks on the jail campus.

Additionally, a vacant, dilapidated prefabricated structure on the jail campus continues to deteriorate. This structure can be accessed by inmates allowing for a potential liability to the County. Removal of this structure is complex and expensive. Funds for removal have been requested in the 2022-23 Sheriff's budget.

The future for the jail campus is encouraging. Construction of a new jail annex, originally scheduled for completion in 2022, is now scheduled for groundbreaking in 2024. When completed, the new annex will house up to 60 inmates and require only three COs per shift. Staff will have visual surveillance of the entire annex at all times from the Central Command Center. Many of the maintenance issues will be alleviated when a new jail annex is completed. Transferring inmates to a new annex will allow deferred maintenance issues to be addressed inside the jail.

In the past, the FFD assigned a dedicated maintenance worker to the jail. Due to a 40 percent vacancy rate of maintenance workers, this is no longer the practice. Routine maintenance is currently being done in a timely manner; however major repair backlogs continue to exist. At the time of this report the FFD was budgeted for ten maintenance workers with four unfilled positions. This leaves six maintenance workers responsible for maintaining over 200 County-owned structures.

Staff Shortages

At the time of this report, there are 42 budgeted CO positions, with 14 vacancies. The COs work 12-hour shifts, five days a week and are frequently called in to work on their scheduled days off. Low salaries and a lack of affordable housing are contributing factors to CO vacancies. Staff vacancy rates have also been compounded by COVID-19. Due to the pandemic, working conditions for COs were not observed as the GJ declined to perform an inspection inside the jail.

Local charitable foundations have benefited law enforcement with unbudgeted needs to enhance the safety and protection of the citizens of Mendocino County. One local private organization is the Mendocino Public Safety Foundation. This organization has assisted law enforcement with funding for academy scholarships, recruitment incentives, specialized equipment and police K-9 Units.

FINDINGS

- F1. In addition to ADA violations, uneven and dangerous sidewalks on the jail campus expose the County to potential liabilities.
- F2. Unfilled positions of maintenance employees within FFD directly contribute to the deferred maintenance on the jail campus.
- F3. A fully staffed maintenance crew would allow a dedicated worker to focus on the jail.
- F4. The vacant, dilapidated prefabricated structure on the jail campus continues to deteriorate and is unsafe. Delaying the removal will increase the cost over time.
- F5. Due to staff shortages, COs are currently scheduled to work a 60-hour week. This practice questions safety and efficiency which contribute to officer burnout.
- F6. Establishing recruitment and retention incentives would aid in hiring and retaining COs.
- F7. The GJ commends the Mendocino County Jail leadership, COs and support staff for their dedication to duty especially during the pandemic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Grand Jury recommends that:

- R1. the BOS ensure that jail maintenance work orders with liability issues for the County be given priority. (F1-F4)
- R2. the BOS protect County assets by maintaining a fully staffed FFD maintenance crew, which will allow a dedicated worker for the jail. (F1-F3)
- R3. the BOS authorize and fund immediate removal of the dilapidated prefabricated structure on the jail campus. (F4)
- R4. the BOS, as a priority, develop strategies and financial incentives to facilitate hiring and retention of COs for the jail. (F5, F6)

RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code § 933.05, responses are required from the following board:

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors (F1-F6) and (All Recommendations)

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code § 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury
