



City of Seattle

Municipal Jail Frequently Asked Questions

June 30, 2008

Why does Seattle need a municipal jail?

Cities are responsible for jailing people convicted of misdemeanor offenses. Like many cities located in King County, Seattle has a contract with King County that allows it to house its misdemeanants in the County’s jail. The County is responsible for housing felons and those arrested for misdemeanors in unincorporated areas. Because of space constraints in existing County facilities, however, King County is requiring that Seattle and other cities end their use of the County jail for city misdemeanants by December 31, 2012.

Can’t King County just expand the Regional Justice Center (RJC) in Kent?

Expanding the RJC will provide 460 additional jail beds – enough to meet King County’s projected jail bed needs but not those of the cities. Even if the RJC is expanded, another jail(s) will need to be sited and built to handle the cities’ collective 1,450 misdemeanor offenders projected over the next 20 years.

Long-term Jail Space Shortage (2026)

CAPACITY	Regional Beds (including city jails)	3,216
	RJC Expansion	<u>460</u>
	Total Capacity	3,676
BEDS NEEDED	King County Population Forecast (includes 220 DOC contract inmates)	3,575
	Cities	<u>1,450</u>
	Total Need	5,025
	Bed Deficit	1,349

Should King County extend the cities’ jail contracts by two years?

Typically, it takes at least six years to site and build a jail. Seattle appreciates the County Council’s offer to extend the jail services contract to 2014. Such an extension would allow a more realistic timeframe for additional jail facilities to be sited and built. However, simply extending the contract does not allow cities to stop planning for a new jail. Seattle still faces a capacity issue that needs to be addressed by building a new facility.

What if King County wants to be a regional provider of jail services?

If King County is truly interested in discussing the possibility of a regional partnership with the cities, the cities believe that the process to expand the RJC would need to start as soon as possible to enable the County to accommodate city inmates upon expiration of an extended contract. A necessary step to demonstrate its regional role is for the County to include funding in its 2009 capital budget to fund the RJC expansion.

Seattle agrees King County should be the regional provider of jail services. If the County is interested in continuing to be the regional provider of jail services, then planning and siting for a third facility needs to begin immediately. An objective siting criteria and process that includes the cities would be critical to the success of this effort.

While adding two years to the current jail services contract would certainly be appreciated as it would allow for a more realistic construction schedule for the efforts already under way, it is not enough time to start a County-led regional effort and to have a new facility in place that would meet the cities' misdemeanor needs. If King County is committed to being the regional provider for jail services, the County needs to offer a long-term commitment to the cities.

Seattle believes these issues will need to be resolved by September 5, 2008. Otherwise, the cities will have to continue on with their current plans in order to be able to replace by January 1, 2013, the beds they are losing at King County jail facilities. Seattle looks forward to further discussions with the County on this matter.

How large of a municipal jail does Seattle need?

A consultant's long-term jail population forecast estimates that in 2026, Seattle will need 445 municipal jail beds. North & east King County cities estimate they'll need 192 beds by 2026, while the south King County cities estimate they'll need 812 beds. King County estimates it will need about 500 additional beds for felons over the next 20 years.

Can Seattle find alternatives to building a new jail?

Seattle has worked hard to minimize the number of people in jail. Seattle aggressively manages its jail population and actively looks at alternatives to incarceration and ways to divert people into community service and treatment. While the number of people living in Seattle has grown by 8 percent over the last 10 years, the number of people in jail on a Seattle misdemeanor charge has dropped by 38 percent.

While Seattle is working to continue to reduce the number of people who must spend time in jail for misdemeanor offenses, state law requires that some offenders, such as people with a history of driving while impaired, be jailed. The law also mandates booking and jail time for anyone charged with domestic violence. Even using alternatives to incarceration, more jail beds will be needed for misdemeanants.

Why don't the cities work together – why build separate jails?

Cities are exploring their options. Given the tight timeframe, Seattle is pursuing two paths simultaneously: participating in a regional process with other cities and planning a municipal jail that will meet Seattle's needs. Seattle is participating in a feasibility study with the north and eastside cities to look at the tradeoffs between a single municipal jail vs. two smaller jails. The study will be completed in July 2008.