

Jail expansion funding decision tabled, again

Malfunctioning security system repaired

By Brandi Baldwin

The Dearborn County Council, at a meeting Tuesday, Jan. 24, again tabled a decision on how to fund the proposed jail-expansion project until the cost of a project manager is determined. The action came after a \$292,000 appropriation was made to pay for repairs to a malfunctioning security system at the jail -- an issue that was to be addressed in the expansion proposal. The appropriation will help replace the 20-year-old system that keeps the jail doors locked.

Two months ago, the electronic system that opens, shuts and locks the doors at the jail malfunctioned, causing a potentially dangerous situation. Though the doors remained closed, they couldn't be opened from the outside and had to be manually opened with a key from a member of the staff on the inside.

Council member Bill Ullrich said it could have been dangerous if the doors had unlocked and released the prisoners.

Emergency repairs were completed and the doors are working properly again, but because of the system's age, it was stated that it needed to be updated to keep it from having future problems.

"It was just so far outdated that you can't just keep putting Band-Aids on it," Mr. Ullrich said. "This is the original system from when the jail was built in 1992. There are no parts to replace here because it is so outdated."

The system was meant to be installed after the jail expansion but because of the serious situation that could occur by waiting, the council agreed the matter needed to be settled immediately.

"I'm amazed that system has held up as long as it has," Mr. Ullrich said.

However, the jail expansion funding was tabled during the meeting because of a lack of concrete information on costs of the project.

"The one thing we need to do is to get a more definitive dollar amount," Mr. Ullrich said.

Members suggested hiring a project manager and getting bids to find out the real cost, but Joseph Mrak, the senior vice president of the RQAW consulting firm, said the problem was that they couldn't hire a project manager without money, which the council has been unwilling to give without the bids.

"This is a chicken or the egg problem," Mr. Mrak said.

Since the project could cost between \$8.4 million and \$9.2 million, a set cost amount that the architect and the construction manager will be paid hasn't been set.

The project has been tabled until the February 21 meeting when the County Commissioners are to bring bids from construction managers to the council so they will have an idea of how much to allocate.

In other news from the meeting:

- The county will soon have a Reverse 911 system that will notify people in the county in case of emergencies ranging from tornados to dangerous criminals in the area.

"This notification system is for emergencies," Communications Board President William Black Jr. said.

Other counties already have this system in place including Hamilton County.

The system can cost as much as \$20,000 but the county has opted for a less expensive version, paying \$7,425 to save money. It doesn't have all of the bells and whistles but it will still allow the system to contact everyone in the county or just people in a certain select area.

Mr. Black said the system would have been useful several months ago when a shooter was on the loose in Bright. The people in the area could have been contacted and warned to be on the lookout.

"I think it's a great service," Council member Liz Morris said.

She added that it is important especially since people indoors can't always hear the sirens that warn of an emergency.

"Look at it this way, one siren costs \$30,000 and you can't hear it unless you're outside," Council member Dennis Kraus said.

The system will also allow people without landlines to go to the county's Web site and register a cell phone number.

"There won't be any frivolous calls," Morris said. "People would know that this was for emergencies."

- Future County Council meetings will be held at 6:30 p.m. on Feb. 21, May 22, and Nov. 20. The budget meeting dates will be set at the next meeting.
- The council appropriated \$12,000 for flu vaccines for county employees and their families. Any left-over vaccines will be given to the public for \$5 a shot. This money has been appropriated in previous years as well.