



Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office

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TO: Michael Bryant, Management and Budget Director
Mecklenburg County

FROM: Rachel Vanhoy, Sr. Fiscal Administrator

REF: Response to Request for Board Retreat: Empty Jail Cells

On behalf of Sheriff Irwin Carmichael and Chief Deputy Mike Plummer, I am responding to your inquiry on behalf of Commissioner Chair Ella Scarborough regarding the feasibility of using empty jail cells for the homeless to relieve the shelters.

The only jail space currently not occupied is the Jail Annex on Spector Drive. This facility was opened in August 2009 and was closed as a detention facility in May 2011. It was reopened briefly as a temporary Arrest Processing Center (APC) in 2013 while the current APC was being renovated.

The actual land the Jail Annex is housed on includes the 320-bed Jail Annex as well as another building that is essentially a carbon copy of the Jail Annex building with the exception the interior was never retrofitted for jail operations. Currently the County is using that facility as a storage building.

In terms of the staff and spacing to support the idea referenced in the email, I am assuming that this reference is to another County agency or department as when this facility was closed, all assigned positions (approximately 75) were eliminated. Other operational cost were also eliminated with the exception of minimal maintenance costs (utilities, life-safety, HVAC, pest control, etc.). For FY 2018, it is estimated it will cost \$144,471 (\$1.73 per square foot) to maintain the facility. Fifty-six (56) percent of that represents utility costs for the 83,274 square foot building. This is the basic cost to maintain the mechanical/life-safety systems of the facility. Prior to closing the Annex in 2011, the cost per square foot was \$2.66. These are the only budgeted dollars currently in the Sheriff's Office budget for empty jail space. When a portion of the Jail North facility was closed last April, that budget was also adjusted for the reduction in staff as well as other operational budget reductions. Therefore, the Sheriff's Office budget has no funding associated with empty jail space as evidenced by budget reductions over the past several years. Staff from Jail North continue to do perimeter checks of the Jail Annex as well as respond to any alarms at that location.

In terms of who would be responsible for the operation of the facility, the Sheriff and the Chief agree any involvement by the Sheriff's Office would present a conflict of interest since there would be no custodial relationship with those seeking shelter. Our Deputies and Detention Officers are certified by the State of North Carolina to perform specific duties and since the operation of a homeless shelter is beyond the purview of the authority granted to sworn law enforcement officers and certified detention officers, this would present an obvious conflict. The other challenge to the Sheriff operating the shelter is related to the number of homeless persons that find themselves incarcerated in our facilities. This has the potential for a negative interaction with the homeless person if they encounter an officer that previously served as the custodian of the housing unit the officer managed.

A shelter provides for freedom of movement for those that reside there. This is counter to the custodial detention environment we currently operate and therefore would not be a good fit for the Sheriff's Office to manage and/or provide security for. Even when the Sheriff's Office managed the Work Release and Restitution Center (WRRRC), the residents were still managed by certified detention officers and subject to the same searches and rules of the detention facilities.

Another challenge the Sheriff currently faces is related to the 1,044 (as of today) sex offenders in Mecklenburg County. Up until the Men's Shelter stopped accepted registered offenders several years ago, our deputy sheriffs frequently visited the shelter to verify the residence of offenders at the shelter as required. Depending on how you proceed with the project, the Sheriff recommends a policy decision be made as to whether or not, offenders would be allowed to stay at the shelter.

The Jail Annex was built to minimal specifications and although it has communal restrooms and showers, the basic layout is that of traditional barracks or dormitories. There is no programming space to deliver programs and the administrative area has minimal office space. The other drawback is the lack of food service and laundry equipment. The fundamental concept provided that food and laundry services would be performed at the Jail North facility and delivered. Although the services can be reestablished from Jail North, it would require some investment potentially in equipment since the current food service retherm units have been inoperable since 2011. There are significant challenges with laundry, especially in terms of personal garments. If seriously considered, an investment in an onsite laundry should be considered.

Transportation will be one, if not the primary challenge, to this project. Jail Annex, although close to a Charlotte Area Transit (CATS) bus stop on Statesville Road, it has fewer bus stops and its location on Statesville Road is dangerous and creates significant traffic congestion and requires pedestrians to cross the road without a light to stop traffic.

In researching this request, there were several large jurisdictions that have been faced with this dilemma as well. Several have looked at using jail space such as Multnomah County and Decatur, IL, while some prisons in Colorado and Texas have been researched. I found the articles related to Multnomah relative to this discussion. So as not to repeat the articles, following are links to what I considered the most relevant to this request. One link below is a Charlotte news story (WCNC August 25, 2016) regarding converting the old Camp Green Correctional Facility into a homeless shelter. I was unable to find an update to the story.

Charlotte, NC Camp Green Correctional Facility

<http://www.wcnc.com/news/local/old-military-training-camp-proposed-for-homeless-center/308330506>

Multnomah County, Colorado

http://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2016/08/wapato_jail_as_homeless_shelte.html

http://www.oregonlive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2016/09/reject_wapato_jail_as_a_homele.html

http://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2016/09/wapato_shelter_faq.html#incart_email

Decatur, IL

<http://www.wandtv.com/story/22846679/from-jail-to-homeless-shelter#.WGajYgRKCnw.email>

Fort Lyon, CO

<https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/2015/sep/25/closed-colorado-prison-converted-homeless-program/>

Dallas, TX

<http://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/commentary/2016/09/22/housing-homeless-old-dallas-jail-looks-awful-better-nothing>

In closing, the Sheriff and Chief acknowledge the homeless population in Charlotte continues to grow and is a problem that needs to be addressed. Our deputy sheriffs and detention officers encounter this population every day in some capacity whether verifying sex offenders or in the jail as inmates.

The Sheriff is committed to being part of the solution and wants to advocate for services for the homeless in our community. Sheriff Carmichael believes there needs to be more collaboration around the discussion and would welcome the opportunity to be at the table since the Sheriff's Office encounters homelessness in our daily operations. This memorandum serves to respond to Chairperson Scarborough's request at a very high level. If additional information or clarification is needed, please let Sheriff, Chief or me know. Thanks for the opportunity to provide feedback on this request and please advise if you or members of the Board of County Commissioners would like to tour the Jail Annex.

cc: Sheriff Irwin Carmichael
Chief Deputy Mike Plummer