

# Knox County Jail Study Committee

Minutes – May 7, 2007

## **Members Present:**

Don Choquette, Chair, Terry Burgess, John Durgin, Mark Jensen, DO, Bill Maddox, Tammy Swasey-Ballou and Chip Laite

## **Ex-Officio Members Present:**

Jail Administrator John Hinkley, Commissioner Ann Beebe-Center and Sheriff Donna Dennison

## **Others Present:**

Margaret Micolichek, Executive Director – Restorative Justice Project  
T. Richard Snyder – Restorative Justice Project  
Dick Robbins – Maine Pretrial Services  
Dale Preston – Shank’s Mare Bridge Foundation  
Koko Preston – Maine Pretrial Services  
Elizabeth Simoni – Maine Pretrial Services  
Todd Butler – Maine Pretrial Services  
Candy Johanson – Recording Secretary

## **Meeting called to order**

Don Choquette called the meeting to order at approximately 4:30 p.m.

## **Approve the Minutes of the Meetings**

Mr. Choquette noted the minutes were on the agenda for several meetings, but had not been approved. No action was taken on approving the minutes as listed on the agenda for this meeting.

## **Discuss Meeting with Waldo County Jail Committee**

Mr. Choquette reported the Knox County Jail Study Committee had been meeting for a year and appeared to be well ahead of Waldo County in studying options for dealing with the inmate population growth and the issue of overcrowding at the jail. Census information sheets on Knox and Waldo Counties were passed out. Although the population figures were similar with 38,000 residents in Waldo County as compared to almost 41,000 residents in Knox County, the assessed valuation for Knox County was approximately 60 percent greater than Waldo County. This was an important factor because the property tax base would fund any new jail construction.

Knox County currently had an inmate capacity of 55 and anticipates receiving a variance to house 74 inmates. Waldo County by comparison had a variance that increased their capacity by five inmates for a total of 32 inmates.

Knox County’s Jail has an estimate replacement value of approximately \$12 million and only needs to possibly construct one or two additional pods to house 60 to 120 additional inmates. It was noted that while no decision on construction has been made by the Knox County Commission, Waldo County needs to completely replace the present facility.

It was suggested that Knox County travel to Waldo County to explain what the jail study committee had accomplished over the past year. Another suggestion was to invite Waldo County to come to Knox County for the same purpose and also tour the jail. Sheriff Dennison recommended traveling to Waldo County as a good faith gesture because Knox County could draw from their available employment pool. The tentative meeting with Waldo County was scheduled for Wednesday, May 23, 2007 at 5:00 p.m. in Belfast.

## Questions from Waldo County

Mr. Choquette offered to write up the responses to the questions from Waldo County. It was suggested that Knox County should consider any alternatives and opportunities while remaining cognizant of Waldo County's need for a new jail and perhaps a more extensive facility. Discussions with Waldo County had been explorative as they continued to negotiate with other counties in their pursuit of a new facility.

1. What are the jail facilities of Waldo and Knox?

As noted earlier, the Waldo County Jail needed to be replaced. The Knox County Jail was valued at \$12 million with 20 acres of land and could possibly build one or two additional pods to accommodate future estimated inmate population growth. It was noted that it would not be prudent for Knox County to abandon their investment to join Waldo County in constructing a new facility located in Waldo County.

2. What do the two counties have to offer each other?

The proximity of the two counties could reduce transport costs if the Knox County's jail facility was expanded with additional pods. The two counties could share employee resources.

3. How do you see regionalization helping each county to solve its jail facility and program needs?

This question was an expansion of question #2. Both counties could benefit from regionalization because of the similarities of their populations, problems and challenges in dealing with inmate issues, programs and facility construction options.

4. What extent of interest in regionalization does each county have?

Commissioner Beebe-Center suggested leaving this question open ended as a beginning for the dialog with Waldo County on May 23, 2007.

5. What are the time frames of each county in resolving their jail facility situations?

It was suggested that this was also a topic for conversation with Waldo County. The time frames appeared to be different with Knox County anticipating the variance to house additional inmate for the next two years. Waldo County lost one variance due to not proceeding beyond the discussion phase on options to address the inmate overcrowding issue.

It was noted that there was also the state's actions to consider. It appeared the state was not going to take over the jails, but rather wanted a relationship with the counties. The state prison also was experiencing overcrowding and was looking to the county jails for bed space. The state could possibly create a state authority to review the inmate population throughout the state to determine housing needs for the prison and the jails. Even with diversion programs, additional bed space would be needed as the inmate population continues to grow.

## Review/Discuss SMRT's Draft Final Report – Phase One

Mr. Choquette referred to page 31 (Figure 40) of the report noting the forecast showed the anticipated increase in the jail population through 2027, depending on the effectiveness of Maine Pretrial's efforts. Knox County's bed space needs could vary from approximately 96 down to 72. Reductions in bed space needs assume that long term funding of Maine Pretrial Services is a given. It was noted that a review of the Maine Pretrial Services program was scheduled for the end of August.

It was suggested that the county needed to move forward and consider construction options as costs continue to rise. SMRT's Draft Final Report substantiated the figures presented showing a projected need of 114 inmates (55 plus 19 - variance plus one pod 60) that could be housed by constructing an additional pod and double bunking inmates. The voters would have to approve of the construction and there was concern about the time element to go to referendum on a construction bond. The consensus of the group

was to recommend to the commissioners Option Two (\$10,823,357) approve SMRT's moving forward on the expansion of the law enforcement facility for the road patrol and communications center.

- A motion was made and seconded to recommend to the commissioners that SMRT's Option Two be approved and that work start on Phase II. A vote was taken with all in favor.

Mr. Choquette asked Commissioner Beebe-Center about having the recommendation made at the commissioners' meeting scheduled for the following day, May 8, 2007. Commissioner Beebe-Center recommended putting a presentation together including cost figures for the June 12, 2007 commission meeting. A press release could be written and promulgated after the meeting. The meeting with Waldo County would have taken place and points from that discussion could also be included in the presentation.

Mr. Choquette asked if there were any other comments on the report. Tammy Swasey-Ballou reported Maine had the highest expulsion rate of children in daycare. It was due to behavior problems that were not addressed.

### **Status of DOC Variance**

Jail Administrator John Hinkley reported the county expected to receive the variance shortly from the Maine Department of Corrections. The jail administrator explained there were conditions attached to the variance. The variance was a short-term solution to the overcrowding and the DOC expected the county to show progress in finding long-term solutions to the overcrowding issue. Waldo County lost one variance because there was little progress. Discussion of the problems counted as part of showing progress, but was not sufficient in terms of succeeding with obtaining an extension of the variance after the two year limit.

### **Review Maine Pretrial's April Report**

Elizabeth Simoni reported that according to Maine Pretrial's April report there were 955 bed days saved in April 2007 as compared to 346 bed days saved in April 2006. This translated into a substantial cost savings realized in boarding out inmates and the associated transport costs. The number of clients being served in 2007 has increased as a result of hiring two additional caseworkers. The third caseworker's duties and responsibilities were still being developed. The program was based on diverting people from becoming incarcerated. Every potential inmate was interviewed by Maine Pretrial Services personnel. The April report was available along with a key to the column heading abbreviations. Copies would be mailed out to the members. Ms. Simoni reported searching for federal grant funds to create a database to track the clients. This database could be used to make better bail decisions.

Bill Maddox commented that it would be beneficial to defense lawyers to have access to this information in the law library and it could potentially assist with a more uniform sentencing protocol. The database could also assist the District Attorney.

### **Other – Presentation on the Restorative Justice Project:**

Sheriff Dennison introduced Margaret Micolichuk and Dick Snyder of the Restorative Justice Project. Ms. Micolichuk explained the program. There were 60 volunteers in the program to act as mentors who assisted with the program to change the culture of offenders. The juvenile conferences were used to build relationships between offenders and the community. The offenders were given the opportunity to understand and acknowledge their wrong doing, be accountable for their behavior and make restitution. The program worked with the schools to reduce detentions, suspensions expulsions as well as changing the unacceptable behavior.

It was suggested that this was a program that should be introduced to Knox County and could be started with \$20,000.00 and volunteers from the community. Waldo County used community corrections funds to start the program with the program currently funded through the county budget. An adult version of the program could be implemented and would compliment the work being done by Maine Pretrial Services.

This was another avenue to pursue to break the repeat offender cycle. The concept of The Restorative Justice Program was to have the victim and offender brought together to confront each other to discuss their issues in an effort to begin a healing process.

**Jail Study Committee Meeting Scheduled:**

The next jail study committee meeting was scheduled for June 4, 2007 at 4:30 p.m. in the commissioners' hearing room at the courthouse.

**Adjourn:**

The meeting adjourned at 6:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Candy Johanson  
Recording Secretary