

BUILDING THE NEXT LANCASTER COUNTY PRISON



Have A Heart for Persons in the Criminal Justice System

Summary: Now that the selection of property to build the new Lancaster County Correctional Facility has been approved, plans to design the jail at the new location begin. This phase is crucial to ensure those persons incarcerated will receive not only the required care, custody and control but that they receive the necessary preparation to return to our communities in a better condition than when they entered, thereby reducing crime, being productive tax-paying county residents and creating a healthier community for all of us.

Have A Heart for Persons in the Criminal Justice System is a collaboration of organizations and individuals from Lancaster County who have been on the forefront in advocating for a new facility. Indeed, in our 2017 *White Paper*, we recommended a 10-year plan for jail replacement. The oldest section which was built in 1851 and additions added in the last few decades.

As Warden Cheryl Steberger has underscored publicly over the past few years, a poor jail environment can exacerbate negative outcomes for those incarcerated and stressful work for staff, both subject to unhealthy conditions. A smart correctional design can contribute to staff and inmate interaction, can influence positive behavior and lead to better results. Where we are can affect who we become.

As a cross section of the Lancaster County community, we acknowledge that we are not criminal justice professionals or architects. Yet, we are invested in the design and implementation of the proposed correctional facility because we understand the impact of incarceration on inmates, their families and the community. Those convicted of crime eventually return to our neighborhoods. With the proper jail environment conducive to positive change, incarcerated persons can become productive citizens who support and nurture their families and contribute to society.

While understanding safety concerns, those in the correctional facility should not be entirely isolated from the community as over 90 percent will return. All sectors of society including the faith community, businesses and service providers are all integral to the success of incarcerated persons. We hope that Lancaster County Prison Board and the County Commissioners will listen to correctional facility architects and staff and ask for input from a diverse cross-section of our community, including former incarcerated persons.

Our primary goal is to build an institution that provides for positive change in its inhabitants. Studies have shown that people who feel a valuable part of society are much less likely to return to crime than those who feel ostracized. This critical juncture can enable incarcerated persons to learn valuable life skills, morality lessons, job training, parenting abilities and addiction cessation. Treatment and lessons should begin after classification for all inmates, whether sentenced or awaiting adjudication.

We would hope that this correctional facility should not be a place of first response to nonviolent crime but that it should be a last recourse when other alternatives have been exhausted. Alternative treatment court has been established and can be expanded. Substance use disorder is a leading cause of the majority of crime with as much as 60 to 80 percent of arrests being drug or alcohol-related. We expect that most of those arrested due to substance use disorder would be remanded to a drug and alcohol program that addresses the root cause of their crimes. Those who commit crimes due to mental illness are best directed to a behavioral health program with professionals who can understand and treat causes of mental illness. Roughly 20% of the people in jail are assessed with mental illness and persons with serious mental illness are about 5-6% of the jail population. Many parole violators and those awaiting court adjudication, roughly 60% of the jail population, can be under house arrest rather than incarceration.

However, we recognize that those with crimes due to substance abuse and mental illness will continue to be incarcerated at our jail. Indeed, most prison and jail designs now are made with rehabilitation in mind. Recommendations by correctional architects are that facilities will NOT be designed for more than 1,000 inmates in order to make them more conducive to rehabilitation. Proactive policies by our county have reduced the average jail population to fewer than 800 persons. We recommend conducting a needs assessment of the number of beds as part of the design process. This facility can be built for fewer than 1,000 beds, which still allowing room for classification and movement as per correctional facility specifications. Long-term treatment and services that provide opportunities make better use of our taxpayer dollars. A future-focused jail would permit more corrective programs offered by nonprofit community organizations.

We also encourage Lancaster County Commissioners to take advantage of green-energy grant funds that will reduce energy costs, noting that alternative sources of heat and cooling are the way of the future. The site of the facility is in a unique area that is surrounded on three sides by the Conestoga River, close to Lancaster County Park, and near residential neighborhoods. The new facility should be designed to be part of the environment with walking trails by the waterway. Trees should be used to block lighting and noise at the jail to make it as unobtrusive as possible.

Our goals for the new correctional facility are:

1. Transparency in the design and construction process;
2. Engagement of the diverse members of our community in design and subsequent programming;
3. Innovative rehabilitative design designating necessary administrative, supervisory, medical /mental health and programming needs for both men and women, faith-based services and programs, and indoor and outdoor spaces for recreation and family visitation, with the capability of future expansion.
4. Diversion from incarceration to residential treatment programs, alternative sentencing, day reporting and revised bail policies
5. Reintegration as better citizens

PRISON MODEL:

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world with more than 20% of the world's prison population confined in correctional facilities despite only having 5% of the world's population.¹ Understanding these statistics, the United States has begun examining more effective programs that help to reduce incarceration numbers as well as crime.

The punitive model incarcerates offenders and those awaiting adjudication in cells to think about their crimes and how they have hurt victims and society. Many community members like this type of retributive imprisonment, believing such harsh treatment will lead those incarcerated to not want to return to prison and come out better for it. However, the fact is that isolation in jail only disengages offenders more. They do not have the ability to successfully lead their lives free of crime prior to incarceration due to a variety of factors. When released, now these offenders have records and are, many times, further ostracized so it's much harder to obtain gainful employment, have decent housing and to feel invested in their community. They only learn more violence and retribution and that "model" of behavior will be used when these same inmates are released back into our communities.

Those persons who are integrated in society are much less likely to commit crime.² In addition, key factors exist that are demonstrated to lead to more successful outcomes for returning citizens: employment, housing, health, skill development, mentoring and healthy relationships.³

While the punitive model warehouses and releases offenders from incarceration with high recidivism rates, the rehabilitative model analyzes why crime is committed and addresses its root causes through evidence-based programs. Offenders can be sentenced to treatment for drug and alcohol use disorder, for behavioral health, and for life skills so they have the tools to come out to live productively in our neighborhoods upon release. They, therefore, can contribute to our economy by paying taxes and supporting their families. If provided mentors/life coaches who model good choices and demonstrate compassion, returning citizens are even more likely to succeed. Expansion of faith-based services and programs can connect volunteers to inmates to help in transitions to the world outside the jail.

¹ See the Key Statistics page on the BJS website at <https://bjs.ojp.gov/data/key-statistics>

² Davis et.al, 2012:448; Zondi, 2012:766

³ "Successful Re-Entry: A Community Level Analysis": The Harvard University Institute of Politics Criminal Justice Policy Group, Dec 2019

BUILDING DESIGN:

Prison designs play a big role in the rehabilitative model of criminal justice. Dr Marayca López is currently a Senior Corrections analyst and planner for CGL/RicciGreene Associates, a pre-eminent criminal justice planning and design firm based in New York specializing in providing secure and normative environments that promote positive behavioral change and successful re-entry. She has cited factors that determine a successful correctional facility including:

- Convey the belief that the people incarcerated are of value;
- Provide access to natural light and fresh air, connectiveness to nature, and allow a variety of spaces and outside views, thereby contributing to mental and social well-being. Enable a comfortable temperature and reduce noise to allow an atmosphere whereby inmates can learn positive behaviors;
- Build a facility that is incorporated into the neighborhood, showing a good appearance;
- Build a facility that is never more than 1,000 offenders, thereby allowing more focused attention and individualized treatment based on behavioral assessments. Allow congregating of inmates to replicate activities they would be doing on the outside such as watching television, studying, playing games, reading, dining and even cooking. Allow men and women to meet in small groups to learn how to interact appropriately to develop healthier relationships;
- Allow direct supervision of officers to inmates and engagement of officers with inmates so they can identify and address problems before they escalate. Allow inmates as much as possible control over their behavior so they learn to manage and be responsible for their actions.⁴

Have A Heart will be addressing specific areas of design we believe should be considered in the new correctional facility. The white paper that we are compiling is a deliberately thoughtful document based on demonstrated effective programs and research. We plan to present the rest of our report to the Lancaster County Prison Board next month with the hopes that, as an invested, educated and experienced group of people, members of the Board and County Commissioners will seriously consider our recommendations.

Thank you for the opportunity.

⁴ “How to build for success: prison design and infrastructure as a tool for rehabilitation”, Dr Marayca López, 24th July 2014

HAVE A HEART FOR PERSONS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

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