

# Johnson County Justice Center

Questions

**Safety - Security - Space**

Answers

**Why do we need a Justice Center?** Johnson County, Iowa has critical safety, security and space deficiencies in the existing Jail and Courthouse. A new Justice Center will resolve these concerns.

**JAIL:** The present Jail, opened in 1981, is out of compliance with state requirements for inmate space and is deficient in safety and design standards which poses threats to the safety of deputies working in the Jail and for inmates themselves. Over \$1.3 million per year is spent transporting prisoners to distant sites with available space. Originally designed with a capacity of 46 inmates, the Jail interior has been twice modified to increase capacity to 92. The current average number of inmates held per day has exceeded 170 and has reached levels of 200. While housing prisoners outside of Johnson County in other county jail facilities has been a short-term solution to address Jail overcrowding, the process is highly dependent on other counties having space available. Proper footings for upward expansion were not included when the Jail was built, and the Jail is located in an area landlocked by property owned by the University of Iowa.

**COURTHOUSE:** Despite adding Sheriff's deputies and other security initiatives, due to age and design standards of the 112+ year-old facility, the present Courthouse presents a potential threat to the personal safety of visitors, employees, judges, jurors, and possibly hampering courtroom proceedings. Offices and chambers for the County Attorney, Clerk of Court, judges and juries lack sufficient space and security provisions. There is no entrance system/checkpoint protecting against weapons and no separation of criminals/suspects from the general public.

**What would be in the new Justice Center?** Johnson County has conducted a preliminary analysis of space needed for inmate housing, jail alternatives, Sheriff's Office, County Attorney's Office, Clerk of Court, judges, court functions and support space. The analysis determined approximately 153,800 square feet of space is necessary to fulfill these needs. The existing Courthouse will be used for expanding the Johnson County Attorney's Office and the large ceremonial courtroom; along with some existing courtrooms will likely be utilized. The Justice Center would house 195 inmates, Sheriff's Office, new courtrooms, Clerk of Court, meeting space, secured space for life skills classes, substance abuse and mental health diversion treatment areas, all of which are designed to reduce inmate recidivism.

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**Where would the new Justice Center be located?** The Justice Center will be located on land behind the Courthouse and adjacent to the right-of-way of Harrison Street. All components will be accommodated on property owned by the County with the possible exception that some of the required parking may be located in nearby parking ramps. Johnson County is also in the process of purchasing the final of seven homes across from the existing Jail and is in negotiations to acquire land owned by the General Services Administration (Federal parking lot) south of the Courthouse. Without disturbing the exterior of the Courthouse, the new Justice Center will connect to the Courthouse with a single secure entrance. A pre-schematic design (as shown on the front cover) has been developed to show a diagram of the site and appearance of the new Justice Center. Additional information about the design and its features can be found at [johnson-county.com](http://johnson-county.com).

**How do we pay for a new Justice Center and how much will it cost?** The Johnson County Board of Supervisors approved bonding language for a vote to take place on May 7, 2013. The total cost of the bond will not exceed \$43.5 million, which includes the new Justice Center, site design, minimal onsite parking, professional fees and contingencies. It is estimated that a \$43.5 million bond would have a tax impact of \$22.46 per \$100,000 of assessed value on residential property per year for 20 years. Current funds spent on jail transport will help offset additional operating costs for the new facility.

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**What steps has Johnson County taken to address jail overcrowding?**

In 2000, voters rejected the proposal to build a new jail. Voters wanted additional alternatives and treatments to incarceration; clearer vision for space and location planning; and more public awareness and information. Since that time, the concept of a Justice Center to include updates to the Courthouse have been added and an award winning Mental Health Diversion Program has been implemented. The proposed Justice Center would provide much needed additional space to expand mental health diversion, along with other programming including substance abuse assessments, drug courts, and electronic monitoring opportunities. In addition, the Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee (CJCC) was formed and four sub-committees were created: Facilities; Alternatives and Treatments; Funding and Grants; and Information and Outreach. The Board of Supervisors approved placing a bond referendum before the voters in November 2012 which would have authorized the County to bond up to \$46.8 million. While the measure received support of 55% of those voting, it failed to achieve the required 60% approval required for passage. The Board of Supervisors has now approved placing a revised plan before the voters in a special election to be held on May 7, 2013.

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## Questions and Answers

**Prepared by the Criminal Justice  
Coordinating Committee  
(CJCC)**

For more information:  
**[johnson-county.com](http://johnson-county.com)**



Johnson County Board of Supervisors  
356-6000  
Johnson County Sheriff  
356-6020  
Johnson County Attorney  
339-6100