

6/2/82 - Green Sheet

Architects say iron bars make a better prison

The architects went back to the drawing board and came up with an idea to prevent any more escapes from the new Santa Cruz County Jail. They proposed that steel bars be put in the windows that had proved to be vulnerable to the desire for freedom by determined inmates.

Supervisors decided last week that not entirely original idea had merit and so authorized the expenditure of \$23,000 to install the bars in the windows of 57 prisoner cells in the facility that has had two escapes in the year it has been in operation.

They also listened sympathetically as Sheriff Al Noren, expressing exasperation at the problems that have plagued the new jail, urged them to take some action, even to the extent of preparing for litigation, to prod contractors into fixing the glitches that have popped up in the facility.

Noren said his office and that of the county administrative officer had been stymied for a year in their efforts to get the contractors to repair such faulty installations as the sensors, the gizmos that are supposed to sound an alert when somebody's on the jail roof but so far have failed to work.

He asked the board to consider pursuing the matter in the courts if the problems continue.

The supervisors agreed that the problems are vexing, but they said that before any steps could be taken to initiate legal action, they would need more specific information on the failures and who was responsible for them. They indicated they would like to discuss the details in a closed litigation session.

More than one disparaging remark was made during the discussion about how "modern" and "state-of-the-art" detention facilities might not be all they're cracked up to be.

But Roy S. Latka, a partner in the San Francisco firm of Correction Facility Architects, said that a given detention facility must be designed with certain staffing levels in mind. He said that the original staffing levels envisioned for the new Santa Cruz facility had been cut back because of the financial crunch, making the facility susceptible to the breakdowns that occurred.

The windows through which the two escapes took place were not designed to be absolutely unbreakable, Latka said. With tools and enough time, he said, the windows could be broken out. He said, however, that if the detention staff had been up to the levels envisioned, the escape attempts would almost certainly have been detected.

"You've got up to 48 inmates (at a given time) who are without supervision," Latka said.

The only official action the board took Tuesday was to approve the plans for installation of bars in the windows, with the \$23,000 to pay for them to come out of contingency funds.

In other actions Tuesday, supervisors:

—Accepted "for consideration" recommendations on how federal revenue sharing funds should be apportioned in the coming fiscal year. The recommendations from County Administrative Officer George Newell's office reflect the deep cuts (more than a half-million dollars) from last year's amounts and include elimination of many allocations, including those for Senior Job Placement, El Pajaro Community Development Corp., Family Services Organization of the Pajaro Valley, Salud Para La Gente, Women's Health Center and others. Cuts were recommended in virtually all the other community programs that have traditionally received revenue sharing money. Public hearings on these recommendations will be held on June 10 and 11.

—With Supervisors Robley Levy, who represents the area, and Dan Forbus opposing, authorized a study at a cost of no more than \$10,000 of a possible dump site in the Midcounty area. Mrs. Levy and Forbus said that because of traffic and residential constraints, there was no possibility in their view that a dump site could be located in the Midcounty and it would be a waste of money to search for one. But Supervisor Gary Patton, while agreeing that it was doubtful such a site could be found, argued that if one could be found the savings in energy consumption (trucking and hauling waste to the dump) would be substantial. The board delayed until June 15 further consideration of an overall financial plan for dealing with the refuse disposal problem, now becoming acute because the dump site on Buena Vista Road is just about at capacity.

Summer day camp