

Sail

A New Jail? No Money And Little Interest

(Second of three articles.)

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"What we need is somebody to take an interest in the problem. Right now, nobody wants to do it," said Phil Harry, chairman of the board of supervisors, referring to the inadequate county jail facility.

Shortly after Harry noted such inactivity, somebody did do something. Keith Lesar, an attorney at Community Advocates, a branch of Legal Aid, filed suit on behalf of three inmates in an attempt to force closure of the jail.

One county official remarked, "Maybe this is just the thing we need to get something done."

The suit names Sheriff Doug James and the board of supervisors as defendants. It alleges that incarceration in the jail constitutes "cruel and unusual punishment." It claims that the jail is unsafe for the inmates, lacks recreational, educational and rehabilitative activities, is "unsanitary" and

basically inadequate.

Such an action, even if it forced the jail to shut its doors, does nothing to satisfy the need for a new jail. California Atty. Gen. Evelle Younger, on a recent visit to Santa Cruz, cited the main problem behind any attempt to construct a jail. "Sure, we'll always need jails, but the problem is trying to convince the people that facilities need to be built. There are a lot of programs that have a higher priority."

Harry agreed. "Most people aren't sympathetic to the problems of prisoners. At least 80 per cent figure that it is not a problem."

Despite such a lack of interest, Harry felt that a new jail should be approved by the voter. Even with revenue sharing money coming the county's way, Harry said "It would be a good thing to find what people's priorities are. We should let the people decide where they want the money spent — and that includes construction of a new jail."

He said that the cost of a new

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facility has been estimated at \$5 million.

Harry added that the mood of the public would have to be weighed carefully before a vote on the matter could be taken. "If a bond issue for construction of a new jail were to fail, it would be a long time before another vote could be taken."

Some observers wonder why a jail wasn't included in the county courthouse when it was constructed in 1967. The only jail facilities in the building are two holding tanks used to house prisoners on the day of their trial.

"The attitude toward jails was entirely different when the building was constructed than it is now," said Harry. "Now, middle class kids are getting busted for drugs and other crimes. They also are arresting a much more vocal person now who demands what the state law gives him."

No specific plans for a new

jail have been made. "Just talk," said James. Building sites have been discussed, James noted, but a concrete plan has not been drawn up.

Supervisor Dan Forbus said that "there have been several studies and a lot of talk, but nothing concrete has come of it."

"There is one problem which needs solving before plans can be made. 'It sure looks like the state is going out of the prison business,'" James said. He added that until local governments are advised of the state's plans, it is impossible to foretell the ultimate demands on local facilities.

Asst. Sheriff Lee Davis noted, "It appears the state is phasing out of the program. If they are closing their facilities and we're taking things over at the local level, they should provide funds to us."

In an effort to find out what the state has planned, James

has sent a letter to the State Sheriff's Association requesting its help in discovering what the state is going to do in the area of detention programs.

Until the state clarifies its position, James said, it is nearly impossible to go ahead with programs at the county level.

"In the meantime," Davis said, "We're looking for interim solutions." Such solutions include "or" (releasing arrestees on their own recognizance) as many people as possible, releasing all pre-trial misdemeanants "if we have a reasonable assurance that they won't leave" and sending sentenced prisoners to the rehabilitation center.

"We don't know how successful we are with our solutions," said James. "But there really isn't much we can do."

James added that other interim solutions will have to come from citizens of the county. "We feed them and keep them healthy. People on the outside could be a big help to give the prisoners more than that."

Currently, there is only one group which is actively working with inmates. It is known as the "Friends in Contact" organization, an offshoot of Volunteer Services.

Margie Forbush, chairman of

the group, said that she became involved with helping prisoners "because people forget that they are real people, not just animals. They have gotten into trouble somehow, but they still have human feelings."

"Friends in Contact" works only with the women prisoners. A group to aid the men is still in the planning stage. Mrs. Forbush said that the women in the group began by bringing the women inmates art and craft material, "but now we come as friends, and the girls look forward to our arrival. It is actually the high-point of their week."

Joan Spencer, a volunteer worker for the group, said "Friends in Contact" provides the women inmates with nearly all their recreation. "That's not a criticism of anybody, because the sheriff just doesn't have the staff to operate the jail effectively."

James, noting the same problem, said, "We should have a system complete with research input and a large staff. At present, we have a big problem, but we just don't have the staff or the facilities to solve it."

Tomorrow: Several observers comment on what features should be included in a prison, given adequate facilities and staff.

Board Continues Seascape Matter