

# Jail Crowding Report

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The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors heard a report this week on ways to reduce the county's jail population, but even with the substantial reductions laid out in the plan, the county may still be on its way to construction of another jail.

In the summer of 1986, Santa Cruz County opened the second wing of its new maximum-security Water Street Jail, but the new facility was overcrowded even before it opened. The official capacity of the jail is 230, but for the last six months of 1986 its average population was 318. The

county formed a task force to look at the overcrowding and the majority report of that committee recommended that the county build a new medium-security jail with \$1.3 million in funding available from the state. The recommended jail would also include facilities for treatment of prisoners with substance abuse and mental health problems. To get the state money, the county would have to submit some application materials by mid-July.

Some members of the task force (including representatives from the public defenders office, the Legal Aid Society of Santa Cruz County and Friends Outside) did not support the new jail, and urged more study of alternatives to incarceration. Thanks to county supervisor Joe Cucchiara, that study was not only completed in record time but didn't cost the county a dime. He managed to get federal funding for a study by the National Center on Institutions and Alternatives, which presented its report this week.

The report focused not so much on getting more inmates out, but on getting people out of jail faster by accelerating existing release programs, and making better use of the county's minimum security farm facility in Watsonville. The study concluded that the county could reduce its ongoing jail population by between 125 and 175 beds for between \$1.1 and 1.3 million a year. For comparison, it estimated that a new 150-bed jail would cost more than \$7.5 million, with annual operating costs of at least \$2.25 million.

The report now goes to the county administrator, who will use it and the task force report to formulate a recommendation on the new jail proposal. That matter is expected to be before the board when it begins annual budget hearings later this month.

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