

Jails

Jail Inmate Reduction Plans Pass

BY TOM HONIG
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Machinery was set in motion Wednesday by the board of supervisors to begin an active campaign to reduce the population of the county jail on Front Street.

Meeting at a special public hearing Wednesday night at Harbor High School's Little Theater, the board took no action on a second and more controversial issue: should a new jail be built?

Supervisors, by a 5 - 0 vote, decided a special "design consultant" should further examine that question, specifically focusing on whether the sheriff's building on Front Street could be adequately renovated to house a modern jail or if a new jail should be built.

Just who this person would be or what his exact duties would be was not spelled out by the board. Instead, supervisors asked County Administrative Officer Ted Durkee to consider that question, as well as what qualifications that person should have.

The board's decision to begin the campaign to lower the jail population was no surprise, as they voted to implement seven recommendations made by Durkee in September.

Those recommendations include the implementation of a formal pre-trial release for people accused of a felony, a program to increase misdemeanor releases, an increase in field citations of misdemeanants, a program to send drunks to county detoxification wards, the start of a citation release program for selected drunken drivers and the possible hiring of a criminal justice specialist position to monitor and evaluate all phases of the program.

There was no objection voiced to those recommendations, and a motion by Supervisor Henry Mello to start to work on them passed unanimously.

The jail question was a different story.

Sentiment exists, especially in law enforcement circles, that a new jail is desperately needed to provide humane treatment for prisoners waiting for their trial.

There is an opposing view that a new jail should not be built until the effect of the new programs on the jail population can be studied. That view was expressed Wednesday time and again by citizens who spoke to the board.

The Jail Moratorium Coalition, a citizen's group which favors renovation of the Front Street jail and a moratorium on the construction of a new jail, has time and again expressed its opinion at public meetings. Members of the coalition Wednesday again called on the board to refrain from constructing a new jail. Ironically, it was a non-member who explained JMC's position best.

Mike Rotkin, a member of an advisory committee appointed in 1973 to assist the board in making the decision regarding the jail problem, opined "no matter what size you build a jail, you fill it up." He suggested that an overcrowded jail "puts the pressure" on judges and the sheriff to come up with as many release programs as possible.

Rotkin, however, made it clear that he was not in favor of keeping the Front Street jail in its present condition. He voiced his support for renovating the jail, saying it could be turned into a humane facility.

A host of other speakers echoed Rotkin's sentiment, yet a few did not.

Howard Sutliff, executive officer of the state board of

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