

Questions Submitted by the Public Regarding the ARC

On October 18, 2011, Thurston County Commissioners and Sheriff John Snaza received a consultants' draft report regarding the county corrections system and the Accountability and Restitution Center (ARC). The public was invited to the presentation and this document contains answers to questions that were submitted at that meeting. Thurston County staff and elected officials are in the process of evaluating the recommendations contained in the MGT of America (MGT) report.

1. Q: If the ARC replaces the current jail, what assurances do we have that we won't "back fill" the old jail, which according to the report should essentially be abandoned as space to house offenders?

A: As the MGT report indicates, it is not in the best interests of the county to continue to use the existing facility as the primary jail. Their first recommendation states: *[The county should] develop plans to relocate the operation of the county correctional system out of the current jail. While some portions of the current jail may continue in use as temporary holding units, the operation of the jail in a 32-year-old facility represents a major potential liability for Thurston County.*

Although, as MGT points out, some portions of the current facility will be needed for continuing use, it is the county's long-term goal to discontinue full usage of the old facility as quickly as possible.

2. Q: Were we told that the ARC would be a standalone facility w/courtrooms? The report now says we don't have the money to do that. What happened?

A: The ARC as currently designed and constructed was never envisioned to be a standalone facility, nor was the intent to immediately integrate courtrooms into the facility. It was designed to be a satellite to the existing jail. The ARC contains a video appearance wing intended to reduce the need for transporting inmates to the courthouse, although not all court procedures can be done via video link.

The *Thurston Justice Center Project*, rejected by voters in 2004, was intended as a standalone regional facility with a full complement of courtrooms and administrative space for all Thurston County jurisdictions.

3. Q: It will be very difficult to change the work schedule, privatize food services, reduce or re-classify staff, and to reduce overtime to the extent indicated by the consultants. If these efficiencies do not pan out, where does the money come from? Are you willing to limit our burden on a dollar for dollar basis – efficiency for construction?

A: Finding the solution for all of the issues related to ARC occupancy will be a challenge, but county partners are committed to finding the most cost efficient long-term solution possible. MGT makes 21 separate recommendations, some of them involve operational changes, and some

involve additional construction. Finding the right combination of elements is the key issue before the county decision-makers and staff.

4. Q: How do jail stays relate to the mentally ill? How will the mentally ill be treated if kept in cells?

A: Like most jurisdictions across the county, Thurston County faces serious and ongoing challenges in the treatment of mentally ill offenders. County Corrections staff strives to get jail inmates the mental health assistance they need. Thurston County has resources through the Treatment Sales Tax, for example, that provide an increased ability to deal with the specific issues related to mentally ill offenders, but the challenge is daunting. The ARC contains much needed space to help provide appropriate services and programs.

5. Q: What was the cost of this study? With the overcrowding of the jail over the last 2 years, what has been the payout on lawsuits to inmates because of conditions?

A: The MGT analysis took six months to complete and was contracted for a not-to-exceed amount of \$160,820 paid for out of unused funds from the construction of the ARC. The firm has been paid \$110,321.54 to date for their work. The county has never been party to any lawsuits associated with jail overcrowding, although many other counties nationwide have been and now face costly oversight, mandated by federal authorities. The MGT study was undertaken in an effort to move both staff and offenders to a safer, less crowded facility, minimizing the threat of such lawsuits in the future.

6. Q: a) Thurston County currently sends their misdemeanor offenders to Lewis Co. & Benton Co. Did MGT look at this cost when evaluating leasing jail for local jurisdictions?

b) Did your consultants approach Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC) to get their business? (Currently they are in agreement with Nisqually jail to house 100 beds.)

c) Who else did you ask to lease jail bed space other than Olympia and Tumwater?

d) The study does not address misdemeanor offenders at all. How is this population being addressed?

A: Thurston County contracts with Lewis County and Benton County for "overflow" beds for various population groups as they are needed and available; MGT evaluated all costs associated with current correctional operations and factored costs associated with continued contract beds into their analysis. Exhibit 4-2 in the report summarizes the population distribution.

DOC representatives toured the ARC on three occasions to determine its suitability to several of the department's functions, but it was determined that the facility was not compatible with DOC needs.

The MGT team met with the police chief of each of the county jurisdictions involved with inmate placement – Olympia, Lacey, Tumwater, Yelm and Tenino – to determine their level of interest in leasing jail space from the county. The results are presented in Section 9 of the report.

Sections 2, 3, and 4 of the MGT report address the full range of offender populations (including misdemeanor inmates), classifications, demographics, crimes and housing assignments and presents the conclusions associated with each.