# MERCER COUNTY
NORTH DAKOTA

# Courthouse and Jail Expansion Project

## Expansion Proposal

Mercer County is experiencing an increase to the number of visitors requiring County services, which has led to an increase in the activities of law enforcement and the judicial load on the county. This expansion in activity has led to a shortage of space in the current courthouse and jail facilities. The volume of visitors to County facilities and limited existing spaces are straining the staff's ability to provide services in a timely and efficient manner.

The County also has existing security issues within the outdated facility in part brought on by an increase in the amount of court cases and in the types and severity of the proceedings. By renovating the County courthouse to provide one point of entry for the public, Mercer County will be able to provide a convenient one-stop service point for high traffic services and also create an opportunity to effectively screen for weapons when necessary during volatile court proceedings.

## Current County Campus

The County campus, located at 1021 Arthur Street in Stanton, contains three buildings; the Courthouse, a Law Enforcement Center and a Maintenance Building. The County Courthouse was built in 1973 and contains the Courtroom and courts support along with offices for the Auditor, Recorder, Treasurer, Tax Equalization, County Administration, and the County Board Room. The County Law Enforcement Center was built in 1980. It contains a 24-bed Jail, Sheriff's Office including 911 Dispatch, Public Health Nurse, State's Attorney, and Veterans Services.

For more information contact:

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## Project Goals

The goals of the project are to provide for the anticipated space needed to address the next ten to twenty years of county growth and effectively provide a single point of service for county residents. Renovations and additions will also allow the County to provide services to the community in a timely and efficient manner. Creating one public entrance and securely connecting the courtroom and the jail will improve security and increase safety for the public, county staff and inmates.

Infilling and connecting the Courthouse and the LEC/Jail into a single connected structure allows for the most efficient use of existing county buildings and the best utilization of the existing site area. In the new configuration, the Jail will be connected directly to the Courtroom, eliminating the need to escort inmates outside and through public and staff corridors.

Rendering of Public Entrance

Rendering from South

Site Plan

Rendering from Southwest

Rendering from North

Rendering from East

**Project Size:**

Courthouse Addition
12,442 sf
Jail Addition
6,664 sf
Remodeling Existing
5,946 sf

**Project Schedule:**

Public Vote
June 10, 2014
Construction Documents
June - Nov 2014
Project Bidding
Dec 2014
Construction Begins
Spring 2015
Owner Occupancy
Fall 2016

**Project Estimate:**

Overall Project Cost
$9.8 Million*

*Includes construction, contingency, equipment, construction management fees and design/engineering fees.

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## Courts and Court Support Addition

The new addition will allow the courtroom and critical courts support functions to be located adjacent to the jail to allow secure inmate movement without transporting outside or through public and staff areas. The addition will provide a dedicated courtroom meeting modern technology standards, attorney/client conference rooms, secure staff movement corridors between support areas and the courtroom, and most importantly the secure inmate movement corridors. Courts Administration and State's Attorney staff and support areas will be increased to support the changing needs of the judicial system and to meet requirements for privacy and security.

Courtroom Entrance

Courts Administration

## Courthouse Remodeling

Moving the courts functions into the new building addition will allow the other departments to remodel and expand in their current locations providing the best utilization of existing County infrastructure. The remodeling will provide larger service counters and more efficient staff work areas and storage. The existing courtroom will be remodeled into a County Board Room / Conference Room. Toilet facilities will be remodeled to meet ADA accessibility standards and the public spaces will be refreshed and modernized.

Public Corridor to County Services

Remodeled Public Corridor

## Jail and Law Enforcement Expansion

The jail expansion will include the addition of 28 inmate beds in 4 classifications, kitchen/food service, first floor laundry, dedicated inmate medical examination area, storage, enclosed inmate program areas, and support spaces. The jail remodeling will provide for secure inmate transport to the courtroom, enlarged inmate property storage and a modernization of security electronics systems. The Law Enforcement Center / Sheriff's Office areas will be remodeled to add office space, enlarge staff work areas, provide an interview room and increase space for evidence storage.

## What expansion options has the County explored?

During the planning process the County explored various smaller remodel and additions but determined they did not meet the projected needs of county departments or address spatial and operations deficiencies. The County also determined the re-use of the existing buildings and maintaining the existing county campus was the most cost-effective and prudent course.

## What funding opportunities will be pursued?

The County is in the process of applying for grant money to contribute toward the project, including the USBA Community Development Grant and the North Dakota Administrator Office-Clerk of Courts Grant. Initial financing will assume full project costs if grant money is not awarded.

## How would the project be funded? Will taxes increase?

The project will be funded by County savings, revenues from grants, in kind services and a coal impact loan. In the event coal conversion payments are insufficient to repay the annual loan payment a tax increase would need to replace lost revenues. Based on the present estimated mill value, the maximum annual cost to repay the loan would be $60.84 if your home is valued at $100,000; and $37.00 on a quarter of agricultural land valued at $54,400 taxable value.

## What happens if we don't expand the government facilities?

If the project does not move forward, County departments expect public service wait times will continue to increase and space, security and operational deficiencies will not be addressed. Law enforcement officers will be forced to transport inmates to neighboring facilities where space may be available and the County will be required to pay for these inmates to be housed and transported. With the many inadequacies in the older existing facilities and the increasing County population it is likely that the need for a new facility will be revisited in upcoming years at greater expense to County citizens.

# Frequently Asked Questions

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## Why do we need to expand the jail?

The current 24-bed jail facility reaches full capacity regularly and does not fully meet the demands to classify inmates. As the County continues to grow the current 24 beds will be inadequate to meet expected inmate capacities. When the jail reaches capacity Mercer County is required to transport inmates to jails in adjacent counties that have open beds, sometimes great distances away. Inmate transport and housing costs have risen in recent years. The proposed jail expansion will add an additional 28 beds and provide four additional inmate classifications allowing the staff to run the jail more efficiently.

## What are the costs associated with transporting inmates to neighboring jails?

The costs associated with transporting inmates involve officer time, vehicles, vehicle fuel and a daily bed rental charge, which varies based on bed availability but is typically $65 to $100 per day for each inmate. Mercer County also has to cover medical expenses and remains liable for the inmate's care regardless of where they are housed. As this practice is inefficient and costly, Mercer County hopes to avoid the need to transport inmates through the construction of the proposed jail addition.

## Will the construction work be performed by local contractors?

In an effort to ensure that as much of the economic benefit of this project remains in Mercer County, the county has engaged a Construction Management firm who will coordinate bidding portions of the work out to subcontractors and supervise the overall project. This process both ensures that the work will be performed at the lowest rate possible by responsible contractors and allows local businesses the best opportunity to be awarded contracts. Our goal is for the project to create economic opportunities for qualified local contractors.