

COMMUNITY JUSTICE INITIATIVE BLOUNT COUNTY, TENNESSEE



FEASIBILITY STUDY SUMMARY

- TRANSITION CENTER
- JAIL RENOVATION & EXPANSION

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FEASIBILITY STUDY SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Upon seeing the RFP for the Blount County Community Justice Initiative (BCCJI), the MBI Team reaction was “How do we help get people back into the community? How do we as planners and architects help Blount County repair and heal incarcerated people, while also addressing a myriad of issues related to overcrowding and community safety?” The Design Team’s goal became clear: “We have all failed if the project is merely a bed capacity expansion of the existing jail” the solution begins with the proper balance of transitional opportunities, enhancements to non-custody alternatives and improvements to the Jail.

What is the Blount County Community Justice Initiative? An initiative is an introductory act or step, leading to action. The (BCCJI) became the first action in a series of actions that over time will strive to ensure public safety by effectively addressing criminal behavior and its many underlying causes for the benefit of the citizens of Blount County. The BCCJI objectives focus on targeting appropriate interventions such as:

- Enhance the quality of life of all Blount County citizens
- Help ensure the safety of the public/staff/inmates and program participants
- Minimize victimization and help repair harm caused by crime
- Achieve cost efficiencies and effectiveness throughout the system
- Provide appropriate facilities and programs based on individual needs and risk
- Decrease the rate at which people return to jail for committing new crimes
- Provide programs which address factors that contribute to criminality including substance abuse/addictions/and mental illness
- Use innovative and evidence-based programs and design principles
- Make time in the justice system productive by fostering accountability and encouraging positive life changes
- Maximize staff effectiveness and job satisfaction
- Accommodate growth and change in populations/programs and operations over time

As we understood how important a force for good the (BCCJI) is, two things stood out:

First, we were impressed with the commitment and compassion exhibited by the staff. We felt this from the Mayor, Sheriff’s Office administrators and staff, Judges, and administrators and staff working in all justice agencies and in areas of alternatives to incarceration, substance abuse and mental health. We heard stories of county residents who entered the jail in dire straits, and now are doing well thanks to the people who helped them find their way.

Second, it was sobering to see how well the existing jail works despite numerous deficiencies and challenges. These include overcrowding, the need for additional program spaces and more support space, and the need for a transitional center to help criminal offenders back into the community as sober, law-abiding citizens.

This feasibility study was completed over a nine (9) month time frame. Our goal was to study and update the inmate profile, examine and develop recommendations for expansion of alternatives/options for pre-trial and sentenced offenders, determine bed needs by inmate category, comprehensively evaluate the existing building and site to develop a facility assessment report, develop and evaluate program options, develop a proposed space program, develop conceptual illustrations and propose an opinion of probable cost. We have successfully developed a design strategy that has flexibility to expand or shrink in response to program needs and budget constraints. The next step is to develop the site and building plans in more detail, including building structure and systems, as a basis for a more detailed cost estimate.

TEAM & PROCESS

Michael Brady Inc. (MBI) has practiced since 1990. We offer architectural and engineering services throughout the country. Our experience with diversified clientele and projects of various sizes and types keeps MBI at the forefront of design and technological solutions. For (BCCJI) we teamed with TreanorHL (THL), a national firm focusing on justice work including transition centers; we also teamed with Mark Goldman & Associates Inc. (MGA), a national justice planning programming firm. Our team also included local engineers to comprehensively evaluate the existing building and its potential for expansion.

Blount County assigned a project manager to manage the (BCCJI) effort; the MBI Team has reported directly to Charles Sterling who assembled five (5) task groups and teams to assist with the decision-making and data collection. The MBI Team coordinated weekly with Charles Sterling, and met approximately once a month to review progress and gather direction from the task groups. At the end of each meeting, documents were developed or updated to reflect the input provided by the committees.

SURVEYS

To help direct the (BCCJI), the MBI Team issued a survey to elected and appointed Blount County general government and justice department leaders. Twenty-seven surveys were completed. Here are conclusions from the survey:

- **92% of the respondents have significant knowledge of the Blount County Justice System.**
- **Over three-quarters know someone who has been affected by the opioid epidemic.**
- **Most respondents believe that violent pre-trial and sentenced offenders should be incarcerated, and pre-trial non-violent alleged offenders should be in non-custody alternatives.**
- **All agreed with the statements “Most inmates should have access to rehabilitative programs”; and “Restorative Programs leading to changed behaviors benefit offenders & the community.”**

What Should be the Main Goals of the Project? (from Surveys)

- **Enhance Public Safety**
- **Help our Community**
- **Keep Violent and Repeat Offenders Locked Up**
- **Use Jail primarily for Serious Violations of the Law**
- **Expand Rehabilitative Non-Custody Alternatives**
- **Develop Strategies & Environments that Promote Change & Reduce Recidivism**
- **Reduce Jail Overcrowding through expansion of Alternatives**
- **Rehabilitate People & Reduce Recidivism**
- **Help People recover from Addictions**
- **Employ Cost-Efficient Solutions**

FACILITY ASSESSMENT OF EXISTING JAIL

The existing jail is in relatively good condition for a detention center nearly twenty (20) years of age. A jail ages at about three (3) times the speed of most buildings that are used only during normal working hours. It is obvious that Blount County Maintenance personnel have worked hard to keep the jail in the best condition possible. However, if you view the jail as being a sixty (60) year old building, then repairs are only going to increase. Challenges that are currently faced by maintenance are issues with security locking system, weather sealing windows and walls, upgrading plumbing fixtures, and repairing kitchen equipment and lack of sufficient floor drains.

The most serious issue with the existing building is not its physical condition, but the fact that it is housing almost two hundred fifty (250) more inmates than it was originally designed to house. This results in operational challenges such as inmate classification difficulties and safety issues of staff having to continually manage an over-crowded and irritated inmate population. Also, there are limited spaces available to provide rehabilitation programs that could help reduce the number of inmates that return to Blount County Jail on a continuing basis.

The existing Justice Center site conditions including sidewalks, parking, roadways, site lighting and utilities are in generally good condition. However, it appears that original design and construction only anticipated limited future expansion. The scope of needed jail expansion will reduce already limited parking and site storage areas for jail operations and will require expansion of utilities and storm drainage system. Some of these issues can be overcome with expenditures for new and expanded utilities and storm drainage system. The harder issue to resolve will be limited site storage for jail operations and reduce parking for public and staff. Many of the public and staff will have to park off-site and be driven to the Justice Center during construction. Long term, the parking issue could be resolved with a 300 to 350 vehicle parking garage, but that would most likely cost in the range of \$7 million. Probably the most troubling site issue is that once this suggested jail expansion was complete, there would be very limited to no space for any future expansion when it should become needed.

BED NEEDS PROJECTIONS

Bed needs for the Jail and Transition Center (TC) were projected for 2040 and for 2050. These were based on historical data and trends in the justice system, such as arrests and the jail's Average Daily Population, as well as the growth in the county's general (total) population. Projections were also based on many assumptions such as the state would not be expanding prison capacity and state inmates would need to comprise the same percentage of the Blount County Jail's population as they have in recent years.

These projections are based on the estimated annual population changes as the U.S. Census and Bernardin, Lochmueller & Associates, Inc. for the Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization (BL&A) have estimated for Blount County. Bed Needs is equal to 120% of Average Daily Population to address most peaks in the population and to provide enough beds to be able to house inmates by classification category.

Year	Average Daily Population	Annualized Growth Rate	Bed Needs (ADP x 1.2)	Note
2017	524			2017 ADP - from TDOC reports
2018	536	2.35%	644	Same as estimated increase in County population
2019	549	2.35%	659	
2020	563	2.35%	674	
	50		60	With 50 Additional ADP needed for Expanding Recovery Courts & Other Programs at Transition Center
2021	621	1.55%	745	Same as estimated increase in County population
2022	630	1.55%	756	
2023	640	1.55%	768	
2024	650	1.55%	780	
2025	660	1.55%	792	
2026	670	1.55%	804	
2027	681	1.55%	817	
2028	691	1.55%	829	
2029	702	1.55%	842	
2030	713	1.55%	855	
2031	721	1.24%	866	
2032	730	1.24%	877	
2033	739	1.24%	887	
2034	749	1.24%	898	
2035	758	1.24%	910	
2036	767	1.24%	921	
2037	777	1.24%	932	
2038	786	1.24%	944	
2039	796	1.24%	955	
2040	806	1.24%	967	
2041	816	1.24%	979	
2042	826	1.24%	991	
2043	836	1.24%	1,004	
2044	847	1.24%	1,016	
2045	857	1.24%	1,029	
2046	868	1.24%	1,042	
2047	879	1.24%	1,054	
2048	890	1.24%	1,068	
2049	901	1.24%	1,081	
2050	912	1.24%	1,094	

With a 20 percent factor that will facilitate housing by classification category and enable peak populations to be accommodated, the current projections indicate that **967 beds will be needed in the year 2040**, and **1,094 beds in the year 2050**. Of course, many factors can and will change over time that will impact actual numbers of inmates and bed needs. Numerous job announcements in Blount County since 2012 could result in BL&A projections of population growth being somewhat conservative (low).

BED PLAN

This Blount County Bed Plan is aimed at meeting estimated bed needs for 2040 (967 total beds), with the ability to initially provide or expand the Jail and the Transition Center after that to a total of 1,094 or more beds projected for 2050. Ideally, the design should enable expansion beyond that, should the need for beds continue increasing.

Inmate Category	Expanded Jail			Transition Center			Grand Total		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
Classification	36	20	56			0	36	20	56
Segregation	24	12	36			0	24	12	36
Protective Custody	16	8	24			0	16	8	24
Mental Health & Medical Step Down	32	32	64			0	32	32	64
Maximum Security	96	24	120			0	96	24	120
Medium Security	270	56	326			0	270	56	326
Minimum Security	36	8	44			0	36	8	44
Recovery Court Stabilization Phase	0	0	0	24	10	34	24	10	34
Recovery Court Phase 1	0	0	0	24	12	36	24	12	36
Other In-Custody Treatment Program(s)	0	0	0	24	12	36	24	12	36
Sentenced Inmates Last 60 Days	16	0	16	36	15	51	52	15	67
Inmate Workers	36	16	52	24	12	36	60	28	88
Work Releasees	0	0	0	24	12	36	24	12	36
Total Beds in Bed Plan	562	176	738	156	73	229	718	249	967

Beds by Gender

	In the Jail	In the TC	Total
Percentage of beds for females:	24%	32%	26%
Percentage of beds for males:	76%	68%	74%

PROGRAM – TRANSITION CENTER

A space program was developed for a new Transition Center on a new site yet to be determined. It also has a series of options, including 192 beds, 288 beds and 336 beds, all with space for alternatives to incarceration including County Probation, Recovery Court, and Day Reporting. As with the jail, these were offered to the Task Groups with scope models to consider while evaluating bed needs. Secure departments are inside the security fence and non-secure departments are outside the security fence; a summary the departments included in the program are as follows:

Inside Secure Fence:

1. New Housing Units
2. Medical Clinic
3. Food Service
4. Laundry
5. Intake & Work Program Processing
6. Detention Administration
7. Resident Programs & Support
8. Staff Support
9. Building Support

Outside Secure Fence:

1. Areas Shared by Non-Custody Programs
2. Public Lobby & Video Visitation
3. Recovery & Veterans Court
4. County Probation
5. Administration for the Transition Center

PROGRAM – JAIL RENOVATION & EXPANSION

At present, the existing jail is certified for 350 inmates. A space program was developed and organized with a series of options to expand the existing facility; those options include expanding the jail by 192 beds, 256 beds, 384 beds or 448 beds to offer the Task Groups a series of scope models to consider while evaluating bed needs. All departments are inside the security fence; a summary the departments included in the program are as follows:

1. New Housing Units
2. New Medical Clinic & Infirmary
3. New Medical/Mental Health Unit
4. New Food Service
5. New Laundry
6. New Inmate Support
7. New Staff Support
8. New Building Support
9. Renovated Intake & Court Transfer
10. Renovated Detention Administration
11. Renovated Jail Lobby

DESIGN STRATEGY

Transition Center - Can the existing jail site accommodate the expansion & renovation and the transition center in a manner that creates a viable program? We concluded that the transition center needs to be located on a new site, so it could have ample space to expand in-custody and non-custody recovery and supervision programs and resident housing without limitations.

- **STRATEGY** - Our design strategy was to build new minimum-security dormitory style housing for males and females. The housing would be arranged around education and treatment programs to provide gender separation and access by both populations. All required staff and secure resident support functions would be provided inside the secure side of the transition center. The housing and support areas inside the secure center would be organized so they can accommodate future expansions. The transition center also would have a non-secure side where resident support functions that would be used by the public and offenders in non-custody supervision and treatment programs have access. These areas would include administration for the transition center, recovery and veterans court, county probation, non-custody programs and visitation. Support areas outside the secure center would be organized so they can accommodate future expansions.
- **CONCEPT** - The organizing concept, of program elements around open courtyards to provide a normalized therapeutic-oriented environment that encourages outdoor recreation and socialization, works for all the options. The program-intensive center would accommodate recovery options for both secure and non-secure populations, and the center would be designed with program success and expandability in mind. In fact, it is flexible enough for the program and design concept to adjust and be refined based on more detailed feedback and budgeting.
- **GENDER SEPARATION** - The transition center would be organized around complete separation of males and females. Separation of gender would be maintained in all departments within the center; including but not limited to intake & work program processing, education, dining, housing, visitation and recreation.

Blount County Community Justice Initiative

Blount County Transition Center

Menu of Construction Options

Proposed New Beds	192	192	192	288	288	288	336	336	336
Bed Total*	192	192	192	288	288	288	336	336	336
Year Capacity is Reached*	2026	2026	2026	2048	2048	2048	2053	2053	2053

Program Name	Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D	Option E	Option F	Option G	Option H	Option J
Inside Secure Perimeter									
8 New Housing Units - 192 Male & Female Beds	Included	Included	Included	-	-	-	-	-	-
12 New Housing Units - 288 Male & Female Beds	-	-	-	Included	Included	Included	-	-	-
14 New Housing Units - 336 Male & Female Beds	-	-	-	-	-	-	Included	Included	Included
Medical Clinic	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Medical Infirmary	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Food Service	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Laundry	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Intake & Work Program Processing	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Detention Administration	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Resident Programs & Support	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Staff Support	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Building Support	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Outside Secure Perimeter									
Areas Shared by All Non-Custody Programs	Included	Included	Included	-	Included	Included	-	Included	Included
Public Lobby & Video Visitation	Included	Included	Included	-	Included	Included	-	Included	Included
Recovery & Veterans Courts	Included	Included	Included	-	Included	Included	-	Included	Included
County Probation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
State Probation & Parole	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Community Corrections Administration for Transition Center	Included	Included	Included	-	Included	Included	-	Included	Included

Note: Year Capacity is Reached Bed Total must be added to the like year of the Jail Expansion and Removation to calculate the total bed capacity for both facilities.

Jail Renovation & Expansion Feasibility - Can the existing building be expanded and renovated in a manner that creates a viable program? We concluded that the facility was suitable for an expansion and renovation, but the limited open area at this site will make construction and existing Justice Center operations difficult. Most likely the existing jail site will not be able to accommodate bed needs beyond what has been projected for 2040 – 2046.

- **STRATEGY** - Our design strategy was to build new medium and high security cell housing for males and the females would remain in the pods in the existing facility. This would achieve complete sight and sound separation for males and females, and sufficient capacity for both. A new medical/mental health clinic would be constructed with adjacent male and female medical/mental health housing units; this would also achieve complete sight and sound separation for male and female special needs inmates. A new kitchen and laundry would be built to serve the increased population, and inmate and staff support areas would also be built to support the increase in inmates and staff. Renovations to the existing facility would be limited to the intake and booking area; corrections support and visitation. These limited renovations would improve gender separation, better accommodate inmate programs, and improve operations and manageability.
- **CONCEPT** - The organizing concept of program elements around a new kitchen and laundry to improve response time and delivery to and from the male and female housing units works for all the options. In fact, it is flexible enough for us to keep the design concept and continue to adjust and refine the program based on more feedback and budgeting.

Blount County Community Justice Initiative

Blount County Jail Renovation and Expansion

Menu of Construction Options

Existing TCI Certified Beds	350	350	350	350	350	350	350	350	350	350	350	350	350
Proposed New Beds	192	192	192	192	256	256	256	256	384	384	384	384	448
Bed Total *	542	542	542	542	606	606	606	606	734	734	734	734	798
Year Capacity is Reached *	NA	NA	NA	NA	2025	2025	2025	2025	2040	2040	2040	2040	2046

Program Space Options Description	Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D	Option E	Option F	Option G	Option H	Option J	Option K
New Housing Units - 192 Male Beds	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
New Housing Units - 384 Male Beds						Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Medical Clinic & Infirmary		Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Medical/Mental Health Unit - 32 Male Beds				Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Medical/Mental Health Unit - 32 Female Beds				Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
New Food Service			Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
New Laundry			Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Inmate Support					Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Staff Support					Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Building Support	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Intake & Court Transfer			Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Detention Administration					Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Jail Lobby					Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included

Note: Year Capacity is Reached Bed Total must be added to the like year of the Transition Facility Bed Total to calculate the total bed capacity for both facilities.

CONCLUSION

The mission for the BCCJI and this feasibility study was to develop and evaluate options for Blount County to better address criminal behavior and its many underlying causes to improve public safety for the benefit of the citizens of Blount County.

During the many Task Group Meetings, the following facts kept surfacing:

- The number of individuals committing crimes in Blount County continues to increase, and the existing jail bed capacity has been exceeded for many years. Inmate housing capacity at the jail needs to be significantly increased.
- Facilities and programs to address inmates' criminal behaviors and underlying causes is critical in reducing the number of first time and repeat offenders in Blount County. Currently, there is very limited space at the jail to accommodate programs.
- There is no one action or type of facility that will resolve all the overcrowding issues. Various levels and types of corrections housing and program spaces are needed along with support spaces such as kitchen.

Our team recommends a properly balanced approach that provides expansion and improvements to the existing jail while also providing transitional facilities to provide opportunities for inmates to benefit from recovery programs and learn life skills to successfully return to the community as productive citizens. Below are our key findings and recommendations:

Transition Center (Re-Entry and Non-Custody Supervision and Program Facility)

- Currently the Blount County Jail has far too few spaces available for recovery and life-skill programs to assist inmates with successful transition back into the community.
- Our team proposes that Blount County consider building a Transition Center to address needs for approximately the next 20 to 30 years following construction.

Jail Renovation and Expansion

- Current jail was built to house 350 inmates.
- Recently the Jail has been housing between 500 to 600 inmates, which is 200 to 250 inmates over TCI approved capacity.
- Our team proposes that Blount County carefully consider which option best addresses housing needs for approximately 20 to 30 years following construction.

One of the challenges of this feasibility study has been how to expand on the Justice Center site with its limited area. Reality is that during construction, Non-Justice Center traffic will be heavy, and parking spaces for public and most Justice employees other than BCSO will become limited. There have been discussions about off-site parking for the public and staff along with the possible need to build a parking garage. Either of these options would be costly (parking garage at approximately \$7 million) and/or inconvenient for the public and employees (shuttle system). Because of this difficulty with operating courts and the jail within a construction zone, we suggest consideration of jail expansion at a separate site where current and future expansion would be easier and would not negatively impact ongoing operations.

Some counties operate a Booking/Holding jail near courts for inmate housing until they obtain bail, are released, or are sentenced. Once the inmates are sentenced, they are relocated to another jail facility that houses them during their sentence or until they are moved to a State Prison. With limited available land at the existing Justice Center, our team believes this is an option to be considered. Much of the program for Jail Expansion Option K would still be relevant, but that program would have to be modified to meet operational needs at a separate jail site.

Without knowing the final approved scope for Transition Center and Jail Renovation & Expansion, the time durations for Design, Code Review by authorities having jurisdiction (AHJ's), Bidding, and Construction are an educated guess. However, the following are realistic time estimates to design, approve, bid, and build these projects follows.

Transition Center (Secured)

- 7 Months – Schematic, DD, and CD Design
- 3 Months – AHJ Approval and Bidding
- 1.5 Years – New Construction

Transition Center (Non-Secure)

- 5 Months – Schematic, DD, and CD Design
- 2 Months – AHJ Approval and Bidding
- 1 Year – New Construction

Jail Renovation and Expansion

- 9 Months – Schematic, DD, and CD Design
- 3 Months – Authorities having jurisdiction (AHJ) Approval and Bidding
- 2 Years – New Construction for Expansion
- 0.5 Years – Renovation of Existing Building

If all the approved projects are designed simultaneously, then we can complete all design projects within the same 9 months required for Jail Renovation and Expansion project. This is possible because two separate teams would be designing these projects. The AHJ approvals, bidding and construction durations would be the same as above.

The next important step Blount County Government faces is the selection of the favored program options to be approved for development into more detail consistent with the final selected project site(s). Proceeding into Schematic and Design Development will address specific site issues, building construction systems, and provide a basis for construction cost estimates. The MBI Team looks forward to continuing our assistance to Blount County Government in this process.