

Committee Recommends New Richardson County Jail

(KTNC) - The Richardson County Jail Advisory Committee is recommending turning the former Armory building on the west edge of Falls City into a jail and law enforcement center.

On a 7-1 vote, the committee recommended that the County Board proceed with the project, despite concern over the cost of the project. The committee made its recommendation following a two-and-a-half hour meeting with commissioners and architects Scott Lundberg and Jay Weingarten Tuesday evening.

Lundberg and Weingarten went through the jail plans and projected costs. The estimated cost to convert the Armory into a 24-bed jail is \$3.6 million. That includes a projected construction budget of approximately \$2.8 million and soft costs of about \$800,000.

Commission Chairman David Sickel said the soft costs are not fixed and could be less than the estimate. Commissioner Jim Standerford questioned what additional costs there might be if the jail was built away from the Courthouse – including staffing at the new jail and transporting prisoners to court.

It's anticipated that the county would have to hire three additional employees to staff the jail. Sheriff Randy Houser said the county could reduce the cost of transporting prisoners through increased use of video arraignment. He also said there are good reasons to not have the Sheriff's office and jail at the Courthouse, such as when officers have to take combative inmates through the Courthouse in the middle of the day. He says there are other times when they may not want people to know someone's been arrested, but still have to take them through the Courthouse.

Denny Macomber of Nebraska Jail Standards encouraged the county to include the video technology in the new jail. He said the floor plan for the new jail would meet Jail Standards.

The committee's decision to go forward with the jail project sends the ball into the commissioner's court. Commissioners will have to decide how to finance the project.

The current budget would require a 2.5-cent tax levy per \$100 of assessed valuation over 20 years. Commissioners could also choose to take the issue to voters in May's primary. If they do that, they'd have to make the decision by March 1 to get the issue on the ballot.