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Committee meets on Richardson County jail expansion proposal

(KLZA)-- The initial meeting of the Citizens Advisory Committee concerning the proposed expansion of the number of beds at the Richardson County Law Enforcement Center was held January 19.

During the meeting Ray Joy form Falls City agreed to serve as Chairman of the committee with June Bowers of Falls City serving as Vice Chair.

Curt Field with Prochaska & Associates informed the Committee that an updated Needs Assessment for the Law Enforcement Center is nearing completion and will explore the Sheriff's request for a 40-bed addition to the existing facility. The current 24-bed capacity has often been reached and exceeded in the last year which require outboarding of inmates and transport costs.

Denny Macomber with Nebraska Jail Standards has encouraged Sheriff Hardesty to proceed with the 40-bed addition concept despite the likelihoood that 40 beds would exceed the County's own 20-year future bed needs, due to extreme inmate crowding across the entire state, and the strong likelihood that the additional beds would be filled from out-of-county inmates.

The updated projections indicate Richardson County will now need 28 beds over the next 20 years. Field explained that the current Needs Assessment document suggests Richardson County may realize additional revenue if a 40-bed addition is constructed since Sheriff Hardesty has agreements to board inmates from other surrounding counties, and has been approached by the U.S. Marshal Service suggesting they might easily fill 20 of those 40 additional beds.

While COVID-induced inflation has had an impact on estimating costs for such a project, Field projected the cost for an addition to the jail at $4.5 million.

More information will be gathered on how the projected cost would affect the property tax levy in Richardson County.

The next Committee meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 2 at 6:30 in the District Courtroom at the Courthouse in Falls City.

The Committee must notify the County Board of Commissioners of their recommendation concerning the proposal by either February 22 or the first County Board meeting in March.

Many Signals Communications