

# Parmenter gives up on renovating the old jail

**By Kathy Parrish**  
staff writer

At 15, a pint of whiskey in his back pocket earned John Parmenter a weekend in the old Oakland County Jail.

It was a memorable two days, followed by his mom whacking his rear end soundly in front of the neighbors.

Oddly, that experience left the Sylvan Lake resident with a fondness for the historic building on Wayne Street in Pontiac. But he's through trying to restore it to its former glory.

"Nothing is gonna happen now unless a lot more people get upset," said Parmenter after his proposal to reopen the jail was killed Thursday by the Oakland County Board of Commissioners Planning and Building Committee.

"I'm giving up on it politically."

**BUILT IN 1922**, the six floor structure in downtown Pontiac was sold in 1970 after the county opened its new jail in the service center complex on Telegraph Road.

It became an issue in February when retired construction worker Parmenter proposed to commissioners that the vacant facility be refurbished at a cost of \$1.2 million.

Under a federal court ruling to solve jail overcrowding, county officials investigated the possibility. But they shot down the idea last week when their figures put the remodeling at \$4 million instead of Parmenter's \$1.2 million.

"It's a very easy building to remodel. It's big, cheap and available," insisted an angry Parmenter, who cited experience as a builder, painter and estimator. "The only thing I see is it's political."

**PRESENTING A feasibility study** to the committee, engineer Don Mallonowski called use of the Wayne Street Building as a satellite jail "not viable."

His report concluded that annual operating costs would be \$440,594. Staffing would be \$1,231,045 based on one staff person for every two inmates. The present Oakland County Jail has one staff person for 3.5 inmates. "Under no

circumstances has any elected official ever called me or pressured me to reach the conclusions I did," said Mallonowski, head of the county's facilities engineering division, answering Parmenter's charges.

"I am a firm believer in using old buildings whenever I can. But even if the construction costs were lower I would still recommend against it because of personnel and operating costs."

**PARMENTER'S** proposal was backed up with favorable reports on the old jail's lighting, plumbing and elevators from contractors whom he had asked to check.

All the letters were sent to Meryle L. Cochran & Associates, a Royal Oak

firm which Parmenter said is owned by a friend specializing in contract management, estimating and engineering.

A retiree who contends the jail project is a "bobby" with him, Parmenter said he is just a concerned taxpayer and would not have gained from it financially.

Asked if he would have worked on the refurbishing, he said, "That's not the point. I just went after them (the commissioners) because I know they're gonna waste a lot of money on a new jail. Why not overhaul the old one?"

Appearing Thursday before the commissioners, Parmenter said the evaluations were all done by taxpayers. He stressed that the \$1.2 million figure depends on how much remodeling jail trustees "can do and are allowed to do."

"But step by step, you're coming up with a real quick cheap building," he insisted.

**COMMISSIONER Alexander Perinoff**, D-Southfield, commended the citizen's work. But he asked that committee deny reuse of the Wayne Street building, which he called "cheapo."

Perinoff referred to a letter by Pontiac Mayor Wallace E. Holland opposing renovating the jail in the midst of brand new downtown construction.

"It's like an old chicken coop standing there in the middle of beautiful

buildings," explained the Southfield attorney. "Just the fact that we could build it cheaper is not the main factor."

"What they're doing in the community is trying to rehabilitate, evolve. It's a phoenix rising from the ashes," added Perinoff. "This would stop that progression."

**COMMISSIONER James Doyon**, D-Madison Heights, stood against the renovation while disagreeing that the old jail is a "chicken coop."

"Remember, the residents of Greentown (in Detroit) were upset about building a (new Wayne County) jail in their area, but I don't think it has detracted from the area," said Doyon, who helped turn a similar old building into a teen center.

"Moving cells is not easy to do and not cheap. When we're getting into rehab and reworking buildings, I would trust our staff."

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## State praises Oakland trash plan

Oakland County now has an official solid waste plan which it will begin implementing during the next few years.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) last week approved the Oakland County Solid Waste Management Plan, which is expected to cost \$150 million.

In a letter to Oakland County Executive Dan Murphy, acting DNR Director James P. Cleary congratulated him "on the approval of your plan, your leadership role in resource recovery and (we) wish you well in your future endeavors in this area."

**MURPHY SAID** the solid waste management system will provide a dependable local energy source for county facilities and minimize the need for future sanitary landfills.

The approved plan calls for the county to build a 1,200-ton-per-day refuse-to-energy processing facility on the 450-acre Oakland County Service Center.

The 20-year plan calls for generating steam and electricity for sale to the service center and to nearby private and public consumers and utilities.

It also will contain facilities for recovering marketable iron scrap from the incinerated ash.

To complement this plan, the county plans to build two modular combustion units.

One proposal is to have the 350-ton-per-day facility providing steam to the Ford Motor Co. plant in Wilcox. In addition, the county would like to provide steam to the Parke Davis & Co. plant in Rochester.

**THE PLAN ALSO** provides for nine sanitary landfills which will accept waste that is not processed for energy.

Two new waste transfer stations will be built to facilitate hauling of the countryside waste stream.

"Our plan is based on experience," said Murphy, explaining that a task force of concerned citizens as well as

consultants worked on the proposal.

"During the past two years, the county has become intensely involved in public participation activities, listening closely to public and private concerns regarding the location of plant facilities — especially sanitary landfills."

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