

Oakland board OKs \$13.6 million jail bid

By Tim Richard
staff writer

County Executive Daniel T. Murphy failed to talk the Oakland County Board of Commissioners out of spending \$15 million on a new 244-bed jail.

"It was awkward — coming at the 11th hour," said Commissioner Ralph Nelson, R-Rochester, of Murphy's \$8.6 million, lower-security alternative.

"I'm very disappointed we've gotten to this point before this alternative was presented," said Commissioner Roy Renslow, R-Rochester.

That seemed to sum up the mood of even Murphy's Republican supporters in the finance committee Thursday. That night the full board gave 24-0 approval to a \$13.6 million general contract to DeMaria Build-

ing Co. of Novi. The remainder of the cost will be for architect's fees. Construction is expected to take two years. Money will come from the county's 1987-91 capital improvement budget.

JAIL EXPANSION is part of the price Oakland must pay to satisfy a 1981 U.S. District Court consent judgment in a suit brought by prisoners who complained of overcrowding and inadequate facilities.

Already the state's second-largest county has spent \$8 million on plans, a pre-trial services program, legal fees for the Sheriff's Department, renovations to two buildings for women, a new roof for the present 1972 jail and transporting excess prisoners to the Washtenaw and Allegan counties jails.

Murphy declined to say whether

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— Daniel T. Murphy
Oakland County executive

he would veto the contract.

That appeared unlikely, given the board's virtually unanimous approval and commissioners' nervousness about wanting to satisfy the court judgment. It would take 10 votes to override a veto.

MURPHY AND Shan Topiwalla, director of computer services, argued that the high level of security in a conventional jail isn't necessary for many prisoners.

"We have been studying the jail population and have found that 44 percent of the inmates stay less than 24 hours in the jail," Murphy said.

"A large portion can be classified to be housed in the work release or trusty camp," he said, pointing to the non-dangerous 24 percent who are booked for drunk driving.

"A significant finding is that conceivably many don't need housing beyond the holding cell. Drunk driv-

ers are high in numbers but low in the numbers of beds required."

"On our worst day we need 136 additional beds," said Topiwalla, comparing that to the 244 beds a new jail would provide. "The total system overcrowding on its worst day is between 6 and 8 percent."

CENTRAL POINT of their case against the architect's \$13.6 million proposal is that the "at risk" population is projected to decline 9 percent over the next 20 years. "The population is aging. There are fewer young, risky prisoners," said Topiwalla.

The executive suggested adding a second floor to the present jail, providing 192 additional cells at a cost of \$7.5 million. A 200-bed addition to the trusty camp would cost \$1 million.

"A large portion of this (main jail) group can be classified to be housed in the work release or trusty camp," he said.

Setting aside the \$13.6 million new jail plan and adopting the \$8.6 million alternatives would save \$5 million, they concluded. "Operating costs of this alternative will be less than the current proposal because many of the service functions — kitchen, reading room, medical

room — will be shared," Topiwalla added.

SHERIFF JOHN Nichols fairly exploded at the idea of reclassifying prisoners for the trusty camp. "Reclassifying is the job of the sheriff, not a computer," Nichols said, aiming a derisive barb at Topiwalla's job.

Commissioners of both parties gave a list of objections to the executive's plan:

- Republicans Anne Hobart and Richard Kuhn, both of Waterford, said earlier studies showed it wasn't feasible to build a second floor. James Doyon, D-Madison Heights, said the state of the art in jail building had changed and likened a second floor to "putting a carrier deck on a battleship."
- Overbuilding didn't bother Hobart. "If we have vacant space, we can rent it out. That's not money down the tubes," she said.
- Democrat Alex Perinoff of Southfield called the executive's \$5 million savings "conjectural. We have a hard bid (from DeMaria) of \$13.6 million," he said, adding that Murphy's \$8.6 million idea could be inflated once detailed plans were made and inflation's impact felt.
- They felt population growth would help fill the jail.

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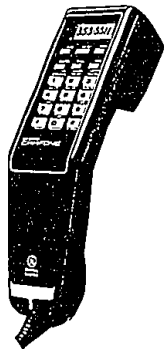
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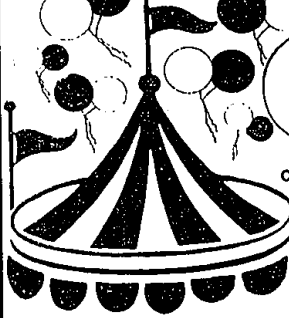
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