

An Out-County Courthouse, Jail?

By W. W. EDGAR
Roving Editor

The wheels have been put in motion to plan a full scale out-county service center, probably in the City of Westland.

This service center would include a 600-inmate branch of the proposed new Wayne County jail, a branch of the Circuit Court and an extension of the county clerk's office.

Impetus for the proposed plan, now in the talking stage, has come from three directions with most of the emphasis on the jail.

The report, filed a few days ago, called for the building of a new jail — in three sections. The first two would be built on the site of the old Recorders Court Building and would accommodate 400 in one section and 350 in the other. The report also recommended that the county build a third unit in the out-county area to accommodate about 600 inmates.

Added to these recommendations is the fact that County Clerk Joseph Sullivan has been clamoring for the establishment of an out-county-branch, preferably in Westland, to ease the burden of out-county taxpayers being forced to travel to downtown Detroit to obtain service.

WITH THE announcement of the proposed plans, storm clouds immediately made their appearance.

County Commissioner James McCartney (D-Westland) voiced his objection to having the jail built in Westland. So did many of the city officials of Westland.

Much of their protests were based on the theory that jail wouldn't add to the prestige of the city and that it might be a liability instead of an asset.

Next came a bitter protest from the Judges Association. Judges protested that the manner in which the division of the county was proposed with Detroit, Highland Park and Hamtramck in one district was virtually a guarantee that black judges would be elected there.

IN THE CASE of the county clerk's request for a branch, Sullivan pointed out that the county owns a suitable plot of ground at Michigan and Merriman Road to erect a building. If that could not be done, there was a mobile office unit available that once served the Wayne County Credit Union.

Citing the workload in the present office in the City-County Building, Sullivan pointed out that marriage licenses, for example, and lawyers filing their suits all could be handled in the out-county branch.

"This would provide a great service," he said, "and it would save a great deal of travel to the downtown office."

CIRCUIT JUDGE George Bowles, a resident of Plymouth, has been pleading for an out-county center for some time and gave his opinion to the Observer Newspapers last winter. He didn't mention a site, but simply stated he favors a western Wayne County branch of the Circuit Court.

County Commissioner John McCann (D-Livonia) stated it simply when he said, "We (the county) own the land out in Westland. We now have the Wayne County General Hospital out there, and we also have a branch of the sheriff's office on the same plot of ground."

"So, if we're going to build a section of the new jail in the out-county area, there's no

reason why it shouldn't go to Westland. With the jail we should have the judges close by, along with their clerks. And if we go that far, we can have a branch of the county clerk's office out there, too."

ACCORDING TO the recommendations of the planning consultants, the new jail should be built with money raised from a bond issue and by a vote for extra millage. This firm also estimated the cost at \$21,285,000 and that the first unit should be built for occupancy in 1974.

All of the latest equipment has been recommended, and this will include facilities to screen every incoming inmate, to segregate potential suicidal and psychotic inmates from other prisoners and to provide both indoor and outdoor recreation.

It also was recommended that the old jail be renovated at a cost of \$3.3 million. City officials are in the process of preparing these plans that now are in the talking stage, and there may be plenty of heated arguments before they're given the "go" sign.



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Second is the report of a consulting firm of Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum, employed by county commissioners to make a study of criminal correction needs.

An Observer Roundup

The proposal to establish a county service center in Westland that would include a segment of the new jail, a branch of the courts and the county clerk's office is meeting with approval of all communities in western Wayne County—with exception of the area in which it is to be located.

Such communities as the City of Livonia, Garden City, the City of Plymouth, Plymouth Township and Redford Township are wholeheartedly in support of the idea on the theory that it would reduce the amount of travel to the downtown Detroit County Building and be a real service to the taxpayers.

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travel to the downtown Detroit County Building and be a real service to the taxpayers.

Only in Westland has there been any strong opposition. And even now, the opposition is split.

OVER IN GARDEN City Mayor James Lowe remarked, "I'm all for it. If it means more services and less effort to acquire them, I see nothing wrong with the idea."

Livonia Mayor Edward H. McNamara called the out-county service center a " terrific idea."

"It would make sense that a county as large as Wayne County would have a service area," he commented.

Such services as the juvenile court and records from the county clerk's office would be a lot more convenient.

RON SUMMERS, administrative assistant of the Wayne-Westland School District, was just as enthusiastic as McNamara, claiming that he could see nothing but good in the proposal.

"I'm sure would be more convenient for all concerned and cut down a lot of travel," Circuit Judge George Bowles, a resident of the City of Plymouth, who spoke of such a service center some months ago in an interview with Observer Newspapers, naturally is happy that the idea is being considered.

Among others are the members of the Plymouth City Commission and City Attorney Charles Lowe. In

WHEN THE IDEA of building a branch of the County Jail in Westland on the property that now includes Wayne County General Hospital and the Sheriff's branch office, was proposed some time ago Gene McKinney, mayor of Westland, opposed the move in no uncertain terms.

At the time he was quoted as saying that he couldn't see where a county jail could be an asset to the community.

But last week, when the Westland City Council went on record opposing the proposal, McKinney swapped horses by favoring the idea because of the increased services that would be available.

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