

County votes to draft jail and park bond

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Content

Lancaster County Council approved a resolution Aug. 14 to approve the draft proposal for the issuance of an installment purchase revenue bond for the detention center and regional park projects.

While the resolution passed 5-2, with council members Jose Luis and Allen Blackmon opposed, it is not the final vote solidifying the bond for the projects.

Instead, council gave County Administrator Dennis Marstall permission to work with bond attorney Frannie Heizer at Burr and Foreman and Brian Nurick, senior managing director at Compass Municipal Advisors.

The detention center has been identified as a top need for the county, due to overcrowding at the current complex, which was built for 121 inmates, but now averages 187 a day.

The county is under a mandate to either expand the existing facility or build a new one from the State Department of Corrections, which has been telling the Sheriff's Office it needs to address the situation for 14 years.

The new jail will initially be built for 327 inmates, but could be expanded to house up to 356.

Funding

The detention center is now expected to cost \$90 million, almost twice the \$47.2 million estimate in 2020. Construction costs post-COVID are a big factor for that price change.

The detention center is listed as the top priority project on the county's third Capital Project Sales Tax (CPST) list, which allocated \$30,130,800 for the project. A total of \$17 million has already been collected.

The bond will go toward a portion of the cost of acquiring land, constructing and equipping the new detention center, including a Magistrate's Office.

The resolution also included the \$35 million regional park project. Heizer recommends bonding the two projects together as a general revenue bond. This would also enact a 10-year pay call, which means the county could pay off the debt in 10 years without penalty.

Council comments

Councilman Allen Blackmon made a motion to amend the resolution to split the bond into two projects — one for the detention center and one for the regional parks. That motion was supported by Blackmon and Luis, but opposed by the rest of the council.

“We have no idea what the impact of this will be in five years; we need to break it into phases,” Blackmon said.

Councilwoman Charlene McGriff argued that citizens and taxpayers have been waiting for these projects for years, and the council should not continue to delay votes to take action.

Timeline

The jail's construction could begin in October 2024, should council continue to approve measures related to it. The actual bond proposal will be presented at the Sept. 11 meeting.