

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE COCHISE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
WORK SESSION HELD ON
TUESDAY, MAY 20, 2025**

A work session of the Cochise County Board of Supervisors was held on Tuesday, May 20, 2025, at 2:00 p.m. in the Board of Supervisors' Hearing Room, 1415 Melody Lane, Building G, Bisbee, Arizona.

Present: Frank Antenori, Chairman; Tom Crosby, Vice-Chairman; Kathleen L. Gomez, Supervisor

Staff Present: Sharon Gilman, Interim County Administrator
Joe Casey, Interim Deputy County Administrator
Lara Loewenheim, Clerk of the Board

Attendees: Karen Chinn, Chinn Planning
Larry Smith, DLR Group
Gary Retel, DLR Group
Jacob Bruce, DLR Group
Phil Bourdon, Project Manager

Chairman Antenori called the meeting to order at 2:08 p.m.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Board of Supervisors

1. Presentation and discussion by Chinn Planning Inc. on the Draft Report of the Cochise County Jail Planning Study.

Karen Chinn, Chinn Planning, presented this item using a PowerPoint presentation. Ms. Chinn provided updated data including population projections and jail facility concepts, and explained that while crime and arrest numbers are declining, jail usage isn't always directly tied to those figures. She stated arrests in the county are primarily for low-level, nonviolent offenses, and while she had 2023 data, full 2024 crime data isn't yet available due to standard reporting lags.

Ms. Chinn reviewed 2024 Superior Court criminal filings, showing nearly half involved drug, DUI, or motor vehicle-related charges, not serious crimes against persons. She emphasized that most individuals going through Superior Court are placed on probation, and violations of probation significantly impact jail stays due to delayed hearings. She stated jail admissions have dropped over time, but the average length of stay has grown from 16 to over 20 days, increasing the daily population.

Ms. Chinn noted that the criminal justice system functions more efficiently when the jail, courts, and sheriff's office are located near each other. She confirmed that the majority of criminal activity, filings, and jail use stem from the Sierra Vista area. Supervisor Gomez raised concerns about the economic impact of relocating facilities away from Bisbee and Douglas, emphasizing the potential loss of jobs and stability.

Phil Bourdon clarified that the current effort is a planning study, meant to provide data and rankings rather than make final decisions. He noted that the important discussions being held will eventually guide future decisions on facility location. Ms Chinn added that although this is a jail-focused study, she was also asked to develop space estimates for a future courthouse and sheriff's office. She stated this was done to ensure that any site selected allows for potential expansion and avoids being landlocked.

Ms. Chinn emphasized the high transportation costs currently caused by the separation between the jail and courthouse. She explained the benefits of co-locating interrelated functions like the jail, courthouse, and sheriff's office for long-term efficiency. She stated alternatives like electronic monitoring, faster probation hearings, improved technology, and forming a Criminal Justice Coordinating Council could help reduce jail stays and overall future bed needs.

In response to the Board, Ms. Chinn explained that while there is a physical bond schedule in place, it's inconsistently applied due to variation among justices of the peace. She noted the economic and fairness issues that arise when individuals can't afford even low bonds, leading to unnecessary jail stays. She stated data from other counties showed that electronic monitoring and better bond practices dramatically cut jail populations and failure-to-appear rates.

Ms. Chinn recommended planning for a 400-bed jail with infrastructure to support up to 600 beds, allowing future expansion if needed. She stated the full program outlines a 468-bed facility with design flexibility, including options to scale back based on need and budget. She stated the proposal also includes a full superior courtroom on-site, potentially serving the Early Resolution Court or high-profile cases, depending on decisions made by the Superior Court.

Ms. Chinn provided an overview of how the projected jail operating cost of \$127 per inmate per day was calculated, including staffing, fringe benefits, and non-personnel expenses like food and medical supplies. She stated the proposed jail's staffing model includes indirect supervision through control centers, with direct supervision in specialized units such as mental health, medical, female, and youthful offender areas. She explained that the current jail is significantly understaffed and undersized.

Gary Retel, DLR Group, explained that while multi-story jails can save on land, they increase construction and operational costs due to the need for elevators, stairs, and more complex systems. He stated a single-story design is generally preferred when space allows, as it simplifies food delivery, inmate movement, and overall operations. He stated bringing in natural light is also easier with single-level buildings, enhancing the environment.

Ms. Chinn explained that the proposed 204,000-square-foot jail design is rooted in national standards, not just preferences, and includes essential spaces like housing, recreation, and visitation. She highlighted potential areas to reduce square footage—such as omitting a new training center or maintenance shop if the facility stays in Bisbee, or using an existing 40-bed juvenile unit instead of building a new 16-bed one.

Larry Smith, DLR Group, described the initial high-level concept plan for the new jail, based entirely on the 200,000-square-foot, 468-bed program developed by Ms. Chinn. He stated the layout follows best practices in evidence-based design, with a centralized support core that includes intake, transfer, release, and medical—key areas that also connect to housing units. He stated other major sections include a superior court above intake, administrative offices and public lobby to the right, and program and service areas (like kitchen and laundry) at the bottom. He explained the layout also features a

secure vehicle yard for inmate drop-offs, zoned parking areas, and housing clusters with small, secure outdoor recreation yards for each unit.

Mr. Smith stated the layout emphasizes efficiency with direct supervision, natural light through skylights, and secure outdoor recreation areas built into each housing unit to meet state requirements. He stated the materials and design aim to reduce stigma and support staff well-being, with multipurpose public areas and a focus on creating a better working environment to help reduce turnover and improve morale.

Jacob Bruce, DLR Group, explained that six sites were reviewed using a consistent concept layout to compare feasibility factors like topography and utility access. He stated the Benson site has great freeway access and buildable terrain but lacks water and sewer infrastructure, which would require costly solutions. He stated the Tombstone site sits prominently near the highway with good visual presence, but it also lacks major utilities and would need roughly three miles of extension.

Mr. Bourdon noted that the sites were selected based on general input, including prior discussions from the jail tax process. He mentioned it's normal to adjust site locations once a preferred area is identified. He stated refining the exact placement can lead to more efficient planning and cost savings.

Mr. Bruce stated that the Sierra Vista site offers proximity to population and moderate terrain, but lacks nearby utilities and requires infrastructure extensions. He stated the Douglas site is large and near the state prison, allowing potential resource sharing, though its remote location and sewer needs are a concern. He stated the Bisbee Melody Lane site is adjacent to county facilities and well-served by utilities, but needs a natural gas extension and has uneven terrain. He stated the current Bisbee site benefits from existing infrastructure but lacks space and has significant topographic challenges for expansion.

Mr. Smith explained that the team developed a list of criteria to guide site selection, including utility development, topography, land ownership, and existing structures. Mr. Smith described how the consultants were tasked with recommending a jail site and developed a scoring guide based on various criteria. Factors included utilities, topography, ownership, existing structures, population centers, workforce proximity, access, vendor service routes, and judicial connectivity.

Ms. Gilman noted that the technical advisory group also had a lively debate about site selection, with strong and varied opinions among staff. The Board and staff discussed the project timeline was outlined as roughly four years from site selection to occupancy, assuming no delays, with added time for design, construction, and operational setup.

Mr. Retel explained that the estimated cost is a "rough order of magnitude" and meant only as a guide during the planning phase. Total cost could be around \$200 million, but there may be opportunities to reduce it to \$130–\$140 million by adjusting factors like bed capacity and site selection. He emphasized that while some materials or systems could be adjusted for savings, critical elements like durable construction and secure infrastructure should not be compromised.

Mr. Bourdon reflected on his experience managing large-scale projects and emphasized that most end up needing cost adjustments. He supported setting a firm project budget early so professionals can work within it, highlighting strategies like reducing square footage and choosing cost-effective sites. He recommended delivery methods like Construction Manager at Risk or Design-Build to bring in contractors and designers early, avoiding the pitfalls of low-bid environments. Lastly, he urged the Board to

consider hiring a third-party owner's representative to guide the complex design and construction phases and help manage the workload.

Chairman Antenori adjourned the meeting at 3:58 p.m.

APPROVED:

Frank Antenori, Chairman

ATTEST:

Lara Loewenheim, Clerk of the Board