

## Compared to Other Counties, Is the Eau Claire County Jail Project Overpriced?

Supervisors Tami Schraufnagel and Maureen Slauson, and citizens Daniel May, Bob Schraufnagel and Ryan Wells toured jail and government center facilities in Dunn and St. Croix counties on April 14<sup>th</sup>. This action was taken in response to a letter sent by Judge Benjamin Proctor to the Jail Special Committee, urging committee members and board supervisors to investigate facilities in other counties, in order to gather evidence-based information about jail expansion experiences elsewhere, and also to explore the “secure courts” initiative recommended by the State of Wisconsin. Officials and staff from both counties offered insight into the rationale and decision-making processes underlying the construction of each of these centers. Detailed plans and construction cost figures were provided as well as statistics about sizes of the “as built” facilities.

Today, these counties are satisfied with their facilities, although both experienced problems with contractors during construction and also, in hindsight, would have made different decisions regarding certain structural and proprietary materials issues. Officials supplied the group with a list of potential problems which might occur during Eau Claire County’s building process. Neither county experienced public resistance because in both cases, it was decided to relocate the projects away from densely populated downtown areas, to sites on the outskirts of town. Citizens of Hudson actually requested that the county move their project out of downtown to open that valuable real-estate to more appropriate development.

*(Original documents provided at each site will be available at the County Board Meeting on 4/21/2009)*

### Summary of Projects

**Dunn County:** *Built in 1997 for \$15.5 million (\$20.54 million adjusted for inflation)<sup>1</sup>*

Dunn County’s judicial center houses a multipurpose meeting room, four secure courts, court commissioner hearing room, offices for District Attorney, Child Support, Clerk of Courts, Probate, Menomonie City Police, Dunn County Sheriff and a jail that includes 56 Huber beds and a secure jail pod that holds 102 inmates. *(115,000 total sq. ft.)*

**St. Croix County:** *Built in 1991 for \$13 million (\$20.3 million adjusted for inflation)<sup>1</sup>*

St. Croix County’s Government Center houses all county operations except Human Services, Aging, Extension, Parks and Highway Departments. (Hudson City Police building located off-site). The center includes four secure courtrooms (with the potential to add four more) and two hearing rooms. The Government Center jail includes 58 Huber beds and a secure jail pod with 120 secure jail beds. *(140,000 total sq. ft.)*

**Eau Claire County - Proposed Jail Expansion:** *Proposed cost, \$60.9 million*

The project includes construction of a 3-pod jail with 266 secure beds and a fourth shelled in pod *(185, 000 sq. ft.; no new Huber beds)*, as well as construction of a law enforcement garage. The project also provides remodeling in the current facility to expand space for law enforcement and relocate certain county departments. ***The project does not address the need for a new secure courts building.*** *Note: Eau Claire County has off-site office locations for Highway, Parks, Land Conservation and Extension.*

*(continued)*

### **Observation: For that price, we could get three**

Multiplication of cost figures adjusted for inflation show that the cost of the proposed Eau Claire County project could fund **three** projects the size of St. Croix County. This hypothetical “3 center” design would contain 12 secure courts, secure jail cells that could house 288, Huber dorms with a 162 bed capacity, 3 large county sheriff law enforcement centers, and 3 times the necessary office space for all court related departments, at 420,000 total sq. ft., a facility much beyond the needs of Eau Claire County.

The Special Committed indicated that Eau Claire County plans to keep county administration and law enforcement downtown even if the jail is moved. It appears that the \$60.9 million projected cost could fund the proposed law enforcement garage (\$1.3 million), remodeling in the current facility (\$8.1million) and still build a quality Justice Center, including secure courts, adequate jail and Huber facilities, as well as office space for District Attorney, Clerk of Courts, Child Support and Probate.

### **Why is Eau Claire County’s project so expensive?**

So far, the answer seems elusive, but it’s likely that the following would explain at least part of it. The downtown site has extreme space limitations. All plans explored by the Special Committee for this site are multi-story designs, with future growth possible by adding more stories to the building as needed. St. Croix and Dunn Counties both have single story jails (although the “pod” has 2-stories of cells) with multi-story office/court space, but because they ensured adequate land availability, their planned expansion would be horizontal rather than vertical. Architects who presented at Eau Claire’s Special Committee meetings acknowledged that vertical construction is more costly due to special requirements for elevators and stairs, plus added structural elements needed to accommodate footing and column strength requirements to support a taller building.

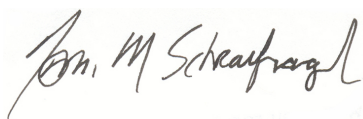
Poor soil conditions and flood plain concerns at the proposed site limit construction options. The condition of the ground will require supportive piers. Flood plain restrictions disallow more economical, below grade construction. Coincidentally, facilities in both Dunn and St. Croix counties were built on sloping land and into hillsides to provide additional below grade space, offering examples to support layout and design options for a comparable facility suggested for the Galloway Street site in Eau Claire.

---

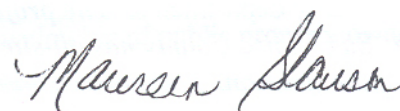
The Special Committee repeatedly warned that building anywhere but downtown would be cost-prohibitive and adding a courthouse to the project would be far too expensive for consideration. That position is called into question, however, when we look at the success of Dunn and St. Croix counties in their expansion efforts.

<sup>1</sup> *Inflation adjusted numbers provided by bls.gov (Bureau of Labor statistics, department of Federal Government).*

Respectfully Submitted by,



Tami Schraufnagel, Supervisor District 26



Maureen Slauson, Supervisor District 15