



Serving Douglas County

Read these Frequently Asked Questions if you want to learn more about improving the jail and the County's vision for an integrated system of behavioral health services.

1. Why do we need a bigger jail?

When the current jail was designed in the mid 1990's, we were projected to run out of space in 2010. In addition to severe overcrowding, the Sheriff's Office has also advised that they need a different configuration of space to better serve the needs of inmates – especially women and those who might have a medical issue, mental illness or substance use disorder. A different configuration of space is also needed for the classification of those coming into the jail and the jail's nationally recognized reentry programs. Research shows that access to these types of programs and resources can reduce recidivism.

2. How much will the jail plan cost?

The County Commission has approved a \$44 million dollar construction plan for the jail. It is estimated that the County will gradually spend \$6 million more on jail operations, including hiring more correctional officers.

3. How much will the crisis center and other mental health and substance use disorder programming cost?

The crisis center and supportive housing is a proposed \$11 million dollar campus and the county expects it will cost approximately \$5 million each year to support mental illness and substance use disorder programming. The debt service on the recovery campus is estimated to be \$750,000 annually.

4. Why are the jail and crisis center being funded by a sales tax?

It was estimated that the property tax increase needed to fund both programs would be too burdensome on home owners, especially those on a fixed income. A sales tax allows for the collection of funds beyond Douglas County residents. Currently about 30% of sales taxes are collected from out of county residents and coincidentally, about 30% of the jail population is from outside of Douglas County as well.

5. Why is funding for the jail and crisis center in the same ballot question?

Both initiatives are financed from the same funding source. The proposed half cent sales tax is sufficient funding to finance both the construction costs of the jail reconfiguration and expansion and the construction and operation costs of a new crisis center as well as other behavioral health programming. The county has funded multiple, unrelated projects and programs from a single funding source in the past and this is no different.

6. By placing both proposals in the same ballot question, does it imply that those suffering from mental illness are dangerous?

Absolutely not. It simply means that funding both priorities will come from the same revenue source.

7. Could the County just spend more money on mental health programs instead of a jail expansion?

No. Douglas County is obligated to provide a safe and humane jail. Given current circumstances and future projected needs at the jail, an expansion must occur to meet the County's legal obligations. Douglas County would like to also fund an array of mental health and substance use disorder services with the half-cent sales tax. Doing both allows the County to serve people's needs no matter where they are.

8. Should the County hit pause and conduct more research regarding these plans?

The County has been researching our jail needs for almost 5 years. This has included study of existing conditions and functionalities at the jail, exploration and implementation of alternatives to incarceration, study of facility options to maintain safe and humane treatment of people who must be incarcerated under the law, community dialogue, and extensive collaboration with community partners like Bert Nash, LMH, DCCCA, Heath Care Access, and many others.

The cost to send inmates to other jails is over \$1 million each year and each month we wait to take action to improve the jail and resolve our overcrowding issues costs the County another \$140,000 in inflationary costs. The County and the community health partners at the table have spent considerable time and resources developing a comprehensive plan for a recovery campus to provide an integrated system of care for Douglas County residents that focuses on prevention, intervention and recovery.

9. What happens if the ballot measure fails?

Providing a safe and humane jail is a statutory obligation of the county. Providing an integrated system of mental health and substance use disorder services is optional. If the ballot measure fails, the county will have to find an alternative way to finance the jail expansion and any plans for building a crisis center and supporting greater mental health and substance use disorder services will be shelved. Alternative financing for the jail could include a different revenue source such as a property tax or drastically cutting other services to pay-as-you-go for construction costs or, most likely, a combination of both.

10. Are we incarcerating more people than necessary?

No. Every community strives to reduce their incarceration rate and Douglas County is no different. However, Douglas County already has one of the lowest incarceration rates in the country and in the State of Kansas.

11. Are there people in the jail for unpaid parking tickets or possession of marijuana?

No. Many people who are currently in the jail have committed a violent crime or a crime against a person and the judge has ordered they stay in the jail until they go to trial and are sentenced.

12. Do we have violent criminals in the jail?

Yes. Unfortunately as of February 2, 2018, there were 14 individuals in the jail awaiting trial for murder or attempted murder and another 56 people for aggravated assault, battery, domestic battery or rape. Douglas County, which is sandwiched in between two larger communities—Kansas City and Topeka—is seeing a dramatic increase in violent crime.

13. What has Douglas County done to prevent people from going to jail?

Douglas county has fully implemented a number of alternatives to incarceration programs to alleviate some of the overcrowding currently at the jail and help individuals maintain employment and family ties and improve their chances of not repeating their criminal behavior.

Individuals who meet certain criteria, including most importantly not being a public safety risk, may participate in alternatives to incarceration programs including Pre-Trial Release, Behavioral Health Court, House Arrest and District Attorney Diversions. For instance, on February 9, 2018, 151 individuals were NOT in the jail and instead participating in one of these programs. Without these programs, the overcrowding in the jail would be far worse.

14. Are the jail and crisis center linked?

Only by their funding source. Although jails across the country are seeing a rise in the number of individuals who are suffering from a mental illness or substance use disorder, the crisis center is a voluntary facility and not an alternative to incarceration. This plan allows the county to serve people no matter where they are.

15. Why is the County spending so much money on mental health and substance use disorder programs?

Working with stakeholders in mental illness and substance use disorders, the County quickly realized there are insufficient services for those suffering from a mental illness or substance use disorder, in part due to the decrease in funding from the state. Douglas County is committed to the health and welfare of all of its citizens and dedicating funds to mental illness and substance use disorder programming, including a crisis center and transitional housing, reflects the priorities of the Board of County Commissioners.

16. Is a crisis center important to treating individuals with mental illness and substance use disorders in Douglas County?

Yes. If the County wants to support an integrated system that focuses on intervention, recovery and prevention, a crisis center is an integral part of that system. However, equally important is all of the other programming and support to help individuals avoid experiencing a crisis episode.