

# King County Correctional Facility Replacement Proviso Report

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May 30, 2024



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## II. Proviso Text

Of this appropriation, \$100,000, shall not be expended or encumbered until the executive transmits a report on planning for closure of the King County correctional facility (“KCCF”) and provision of adequate, long-term secure adult detention capacity for King County after closure of the KCCF and a motion to approve the report, and a motion approving a report is passed by the council. The motion should reference the subject matter, the proviso’s ordinance number, ordinance section, and proviso number in both the title and body of the motion.

Ordinance 19633, Section 9, P7<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ordinance 19633 [\[LINK\]](#)

### III. Response

#### **Background**

The King County Correctional Facility (KCCF) opened in 1986. It is operated by the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention (DAJD). It replaced a jail on the upper floors of the King County Court House (KCCH). The KCCF is one of the last jails built to the traditional model in which inmates are housed in cells and corrections officers generally supervise from outside. In contrast, the County's other adult detention center at the Maleng Regional Justice Center (MRJC) is a more modern facility with an entirely different design and operating practices.

While the MRJC houses low- and moderate-risk inmates, the KCCF houses individuals of all risk classifications, including high-risk. It also houses most of the individuals with medical and psychological needs and has dedicated spaces for them. KCCF receives about 85 percent of bookings, partly because it is centrally located in the county and partly because booking hours at the MRJC have been restricted for many years due to the financial limitations of the County's General Fund. As of April 5, 2024, the KCCF housed 744 individuals and the MRJC housed 584. Most of these individuals either have short stays until they are released on personal recognizance or make bail or are pre-trial defendants who are denied or cannot make bail.

The KCCF was essentially obsolete when it opened. The design is inefficient, requiring higher staffing ratios than modern facilities such as the MRJC. Construction issues plagued the building for years, particularly related to the security systems. More recently, the County has had to make very large investments in replacing or rehabilitating building systems, including plumbing, security, elevators, and cameras. Additional investments totaling tens of millions of dollars will be needed in the next few years.

The characteristics of individuals booked into King County correctional facilities have changed since KCCF was opened. Today, most individuals have behavioral health issues, including substance use disorders, mental health challenges, or both. While Jail Health Services (JHS) provides treatment for these issues, a traditional jail setting is far from the best venue for successful treatment.

#### **Envisioning a New Facility**

The County Executive has frequently identified the need to replace KCCF with a modern facility. While no detailed planning has been done, the characteristics of such a new facility likely would include:

- 1) Fewer beds because more individuals would be diverted from jail or be housed in a dedicated behavioral health facility.

- 2) A co-located behavioral health facility that would be an alternative to incarceration. This facility might also provide other behavioral health services, such as a drop-in center as envisioned in the County's Crisis Care Centers plan.
- 3) Appropriate facilities for individuals with medical and psychological diagnoses. A location near Harborview Medical Center would be preferred to be able to transport individuals needing hospital services.
- 4) Capacity for all classifications of inmates, including high security.
- 5) Capacity for in-custody individuals with court appearances at the KCCH. Proximity to KCCH is thus important.
- 6) A design based on modern jail standards that is more efficient and provides a better environment for inmates and staff.
- 7) Intake (booking), transfer, and release facilities that are open at all times.

An additional reason to replace the KCCF is that the facility sits on very valuable property that has a zoned capacity for a much larger building. A sale or ground lease of the KCCF site would generate significant revenue for the County.

### **Civic Campus Planning**

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Executive and the Council started planning for a new County Civic Campus. This effort recognized that many of the County's downtown buildings are aging and face substantial needs for major maintenance and systems replacement. In addition, many buildings are inefficient, use large amounts of energy, need seismic upgrades, and have unpleasant work environments for staff and visitors. The Civic Campus concept also recognizes the opportunity to integrate housing, retail activity, and commercial office space within the geographic area housing County facilities.

The global COVID-19 pandemic slowed this work and also changed it. The County's transition to hybrid work reduced the need for office space and created the opportunity to close the Administration Building, which is scheduled to occur this year. Its closure will generate meaningful savings in operating costs and will avoid expensive deferred maintenance projects. The pandemic also resulted in large surpluses of commercial office space, so this use likely would not be a significant aspect of a new County Civic Campus. In contrast, the demand for housing, particularly affordable and workforce housing, has increased. The current Civic Campus concept envisions a vibrant, 24-hour urban neighborhood with affordable housing and commercial spaces that would benefit and connect residents, workers, visitors, and businesses.

As part of the Civic Campus work, the planning team convened listening sessions with DAJD staff, KCCF residents, organizations that provide services and programming in KCCF, criminal justice system agencies, and community representatives. These discussions suggested that a new facility should have:

- A therapeutic focus instead of a punitive one.
- Appropriate medical and behavioral health facilities.

- Fewer beds because more individuals are diverted or are in a behavioral health facility.
- Much better spaces for detainees to meet with their families.
- Appropriate facilities for expanded re-entry programs.
- Flexible design to meet changing needs over several decades.
- Much more natural light.
- An exterior design that fits with its neighborhood instead of being a forbidding concrete structure.
- A portion of the facility to house individuals in a restored work release program.
- Improved spaces for attorneys to meet with clients.
- Better communications technology.
- Training facilities within the building.
- Proximity to public transit.
- Improved spaces for staff to take breaks or to sleep if working multiple shifts.
- Improved and expanded kitchen, perhaps outside of the correctional facility.

The Executive anticipates completing the current phase of the Civic Campus Plan this summer and likely will have one or more proposals to continue work as part of his 2025 Proposed Budget that will be transmitted to the Council in September.

### **Funding for a New Facility**

One of the largest challenges in the Civic Campus Plan is finding a funding strategy for a new jail and co-located behavioral health facility. Since no design has been done for these facilities, no cost estimate is available, but an order of magnitude cost estimate of \$1 billion or more is not unrealistic. This will depend on size, scope, location, and timing. There could also be significant challenges with siting and permitting.

Because of State-imposed limitations on the revenue sources available to counties, new facilities such as courthouses and jails are typically funded through voter-approved ballot measures. King County's facilities have been funded through such ballot measures, including the Youth Services Center (recently demolished), the Clark Children and Families Justice Center, KCCF, and MRJC. These buildings were funded with voter-approved bonds or, more recently, with voter-approved levy lid lifts. All other counties in Washington can levy a 0.1 percent sales tax to pay for correctional facilities with voter approval, but King County is precluded from using this authority by statute.

Construction of a replacement for KCCF will thus almost certainly require a voter-approved bond issue or levy lid lift. Other parts of the Civic Campus plan may be realized through sale or lease of existing County-owned property and funding sources for co-developments, such as housing. However, the high cost and unique nature of a correctional facility make it unlikely that these funding approaches will work for that building.

An additional challenge is finding funding to do the work necessary to propose a ballot measure. The cost estimate needed for a ballot measure will require sufficient preliminary design and likely a decision about a site. This will require millions of dollars that will be difficult to provide given the financial challenges facing the County's General Fund in 2025 and beyond.

### **Conclusion**

The KCCF is outdated, inefficient, and needs to be replaced by a modern building accompanied by a behavioral health facility. The new facilities will be expensive and will almost certainly require approval of a ballot measure for funding. A significant investment of General Fund resources will be needed to support preliminary design and siting before a ballot measure is possible. The County's elected leaders will need to determine the priority of this project versus the many other pressing needs for public resources.

