

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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San Mateo County Exploring Options to Relieve Jail Overcrowding Planning Continues to Improve Treatment, Counseling and Educational Programs

REDWOOD CITY, Calif. – San Mateo County continues to pursue a variety of options and locations for new jail facilities to relieve overcrowding and improve public safety with expanded treatment programs, County Manager John Maltbie said in a letter to Redwood City officials.

In the letter to Redwood City Mayor Rosanne Foust, Maltbie said a recent needs assessment recommended the County replace the aging women's jail and other correctional facilities east of Highway 101 on Redwood City's Maple Street. "While the consultants concluded that the Maple Street site is the better alternative of those they evaluated, no final decision has yet been made as to location or size," Maltbie said.

Maltbie's letter is in response to concerns raised by some Redwood City residents that the County is not exploring alternatives and that Redwood City already hosts too many County facilities.

"To suggest that Redwood City is the only location that has been considered or that this community hosts all controversial County facilities ignores and misrepresents reality," he said. "A number of communities ... have County owned and operated facilities; such as the Youth Services Center in the Highlands area, the new Health Department offices on Alameda de las Pulgas in San Mateo, the secure men's facility being renovated in La Honda, and the women's gender-specific reentry facility being discussed with South San Francisco to name a few."

Maltbie said representatives from the Sheriff's Office and County Manager's Office have met numerous times with Redwood City officials to discuss evolving plans for new jail facilities. The County is currently arranging a meeting between Supervisors Adrienne Tissier and Mark Church with Redwood City officials in response to concerns raised by Mayor Foust. In addition, Maltbie will accelerate plans with the Sheriff's Office to coordinate a community meeting at which complete and accurate information can be provided and to hear from residents.

"County staff continues to evaluate different jail alternatives and will return to the Board of Supervisors at a future point with a recommendation to move to the next phase, which will involve the development of more detailed plans," Maltbie said.

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“As we look to replace our aging buildings and provide space for more programs within our correctional facilities,” he said, “we do so with a clear understanding that our entire community is benefitting.”

In her letter to the County, Mayor Foust said even the consideration of putting a jail facility in the Maple Street area has put the construction of a planned condominium project at risk. Maltbie said that stance is ironic because Redwood City officials less than two years ago proposed the County sell property in downtown Redwood City for a condominium development – property located a block from the multi-story Maguire Correctional Facility.

The Board of Supervisors in February received the County of San Mateo Detention Facilities Needs Assessment and Master Plan, which was prepared by a consultant with expertise in the field. The plan outlined the current state-rated capacity of all men’s and women’s correctional facilities: 688 beds at the men’s Maguire Correctional Facility; 84 beds at the Women’s Correctional Center; and 62 beds between two men’s minimum security facilities.

The system, however, is experiencing severe overcrowding due to an average daily population of 1,200 inmates in 2007. The assessment found:

- The entire system is operating at 143 percent of rated capacity as established by the California Standards Authority;
- Male facilities are operating at 141 percent of rated capacity; and,
- Female facilities are operating at 171 percent of rated capacity.

The Sheriff’s Office is working closely with other County departments and local officials to relieve overcrowding and to improve treatment, counseling and educational programs for incarcerated men and women. These include work to prepare a secure men’s facility in La Honda for reopening and to create a comprehensive facility to prepare women for their return to the community.

San Mateo County, like counties throughout California, must also prepare for the possibility a panel of federal judges will order the state to cut the state prison population due to severe overcrowding. This could result in prisoners being sent to already crowded local jails.

To keep the public informed, San Mateo County will continue to post updates on jail planning efforts on the County’s Web site. In addition, meetings where proposals are presented and discussed – at the Board of Supervisors Criminal Justice Committee and at meetings with the full five-member Board – are open to the public. Meeting agendas are posted in advance in compliance with state open meeting laws.

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