

Grant County Council and Grant County Commissioners
Special Joint Session
September 13, 2023

The Grant County Council and the Grant County Commissioners met in a Special Joint Session on Tuesday, September 13, 2023, at 6:00 pm in the Council Chambers.

Call to Order

Council President Shane Middlesworth called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm.

Prayer

Commissioner Bardsley led in prayer.

Pledge of Allegiance

Councilman Middlesworth led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call

In attendance were Councilmembers Shane Middlesworth, Frank Hix, Mike Scott, Jonathan Perez, and Chuck Poling and Commissioners Ron Stewart, Steve Wright, and Mark Bardsley. Also present were Council Attorney Nathan Meeks, Auditor Angie Jarvis, Chief Deputy Auditor Cori Anderson, County Administrator/HR Director Justin Saathoff, and Financials Deputy Stacey Stevens. Councilmen Mark Leming and Mike Conner were absent.

Opening Comments

Commissioner Bardsley thanked the Council for coming together to discuss the concerns and needs of the jail. He stated he is looking forward to learning how the county can move forward in a way that protects the inmate population but is sensitive to the needs of the entire county.

Commissioner Wright expressed his appreciation for the joint session where all can discuss the situation and decide as a community what is to be done. He stated, "That the cost is very, very high and probably one of the biggest things we will ever do in our lifetime." Commissioner Wright shared his concerns from a legality standpoint as well, citing ADA and overcrowding specifically.

Commissioner Stewart echoed Commissioner Bardsley and Commissioner Wright's comments and stated that he felt the county has a serious issue with the jail facility.

Councilman Poling stated the Detention Center was offered to help alleviate the overcrowding, but no one has shown any interest in that option. He disagreed with the Commissioners' viewpoint and thought that the poor condition of the jail has been overstated. Councilman Poling was concerned with the financial burden to taxpayers and did not support the idea of a new jail facility.

Councilman Scott also expressed his concern with the financial burden to the taxpayers and was not convinced that building a new jail is the solution right now. He stated that he believed the overcrowding issue came primarily from pretrial defendants. Councilman Scott suggested forming a committee to bring other stakeholders to the discussion and to keep an open mind.

Councilman Middlesworth stated that he too has kept an open mind throughout this process but agrees that a \$110 million project is beyond the county's budget. He voiced that he would like to focus on the

immediate fix to the problem. Councilman Middlesworth asked, "How do you alleviate pressure in the next 3 years? That's the real question."

Sheriff Garcia presented to the Council and Commissioners. He discussed his role as the steward of the jail, the Commissioners' role as the facility owners, and the Council's role as the fiscal body. Sheriff Garcia encouraged everyone, no matter their role, to work as one team to resolve the situation at hand. He encouraged everyone to take ownership of the issues and work together to find a resolution. The age of the jail facility was discussed alongside daily issues such as electrical and mechanical failures and water and sewage leaks. The jail was built to house 274 inmates. The average inmate population was 357 last month.

New Business

1. Presentation of Jail Study - Eric Ratts, DLZ

Mr. Ratts presented a slide show showing the condition of the jail and juvenile facility. He discussed and compared maintenance and repairs of new and old facilities. Discussion ensued. Commissioner Bardsley asked about the time limit on the study presented. Mr. Ratts explained that in 3-5 years the study would need updated. The topic of the federal courts forcing the construction of a new facility because of an overcrowding lawsuit. Discussion again ensued.

2. Presentation of Letters of Engagement, KSM – Dale Davis, Envoy

Mr. Davis from Envoy spoke about the cost. He stated the facility was obsolete and spoke about the operational cost (\$3 to \$5 million) to get the juvenile facility operational. Discussion ensued. Oscar Gutierrez, President of Bondry Consulting, advocated for KSM. He shared his thoughts on funding mechanisms and options such as property taxes, tax rates, and public safety taxes. Tax neutral bonds were also discussed.

3. Presentation of Build Operate Transfer (BOT) Contract, Sullivan – Connor Sullivan

Mr. Sullivan spoke about the BOT procurement method and how there is a guaranteed max price for projects.

Public Comment

Ed Hartman of Fairmount asked several questions about the Annex building and the plans for it if a new jail was built. He asked where the jail would be built and encouraged the Council and Commissioners to plan carefully.

Lois Jones, Vice President of the BZA, expressed her concern of the financial burden to the taxpayers if a new facility was built.

Todd Glancy of Fairmount asked the Council and the Commissioners to make all reports and information accessible to the public.

Jim McWhirt of Sweetser asked several questions about the jail population that is awaiting court. "How does that compare to other counties? What is the average number of days they have been there waiting for trial? Do we need another court? "

Council President Middlesworth adjourned the Council at 8:07 pm and Commissioner Bardsley recessed the Commissioners.

A complete video record can be found at www.grantcounty.net under the GC YouTube Page Quick Links.