

INFORMATION SHEET ON NOV. 2, 2021, ELECTION 10-21-21 DRAFT

On Nov. 2, 2021, Lawrence County voters will consider a 3/8-cent sales tax to construct and operate a Jail/Sheriff's Office. Once construction bonds are paid off, 1/8-cent of the tax will drop off. The rest will continue for maintenance and operations.

This is the next step in long-term efforts to attack the skyrocketing costs of crime in Lawrence County.

Step 1 – ACHIEVED

STOPPING THE SPIRAL.

When the cost of crime outpaced funding and decimated county finances, Lawrence countians came through with the half-cent Law Enforcement Sales Tax in 2017. This enabled the county to properly fund sheriff's office operations; invest in additional law enforcement personnel; retire worn out patrol vehicles and institute a regular rotation of new vehicles into the fleet; replenish reserves that had been emptied to cover skyrocketing public safety costs; and begin saving for a larger jail to address the costly fees for boarding prisoners in other counties.

At the same time, the county increased use of electronic monitoring to stem the growing jail numbers and added staff in the prosecutor's office to help move cases through the system.

Step 2 – STARTED

RETURNING THE COUNTY TO FINANCIAL STABILITY AND SAVING FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION.

Once a modest three-month operating reserve was achieved and funds were repaid, the county began saving in earnest for a larger jail. To date, it has saved \$873,000. ***At the same time, however, housing prisoners in other counties will likely cost county taxpayers a half million dollars this year that could have gone to jail savings or other public safety needs.***

Step 3 – ACHIEVED

SECURING A SITE FOR A LARGER JAIL/SHERIFF'S OFFICE.

Thanks to the City of Mt. Vernon, the county now has a contract on an 8.52-acre tract of land southwest of the Highway 39/I-44 interchange. Cost: \$1. The county must begin construction within 5 years or the land reverts back to the city. Value of the land is over \$120,000. ***That, combined with savings, brings the county \$1 million closer to the new jail/sheriff's office facility.***

This site achieves another goal. It allows ample room for expansion.

Step 4 – YOU WILL DECIDE

FINANCING CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION.

The county had hoped to save for a few years before tackling the construction phase. However, the current economic climate, increasing construction costs and out-of-county inmate housing costs have prompted it to ask Lawrence County voters if they would like to proceed now.

To do that will require a 3/8-cent sales tax. At its full level, that would bring in an estimated \$1.2 million annually. That, combined with savings and the potential for a portion of the county's federal American Rescue Plan funding, will determine the size facility that can be built. The county hopes to more than double the size of the existing jail while combining law enforcement offices under one roof to increase efficiency.

How big will the proposed jail/sheriff's facility be and how much will it cost?

The amount of revenue available, combined with construction costs and anticipated operating costs, will determine this. The county expects those to allow for construction of a 120-bed facility – more than double the capacity of the existing 52-bed jail. It would also include offices for sheriff, jail, detective and road deputy personnel, as well as support staff, combining those operations under one roof for efficiency of operation. Total project cost is estimated at \$15-18 million.

The county is working closely with architects now to design a facility that:

- ✓ enables the county to retire the existing inefficient, undersized and inadequately built 1984 jail;
- ✓ allows it to house as many inmates as possible;
- ✓ improves safety and security;
- ✓ improves staffing efficiencies;
- ✓ and allows for expansion.

The site and design should be able to accommodate two 96-bed expansions.

What will this cost me?

A 3/8-cent sales tax would add just over a third of a cent to the cost of a dollar candy bar. For \$20 worth of supplies at a store, it would add seven and a half cents.

What the new facility will do – and what it won't do.

While the county expects funding to more than double the cell space, it won't resolve all the issues related to boarding prisoners in other counties. A big part of this is the corrections requirements related to classification of prisoners and the trend toward more female prisoners, more prisoners being held for violent crimes, and the length of time they are held as their cases work their way through the court system. A single crime can impact our numbers, as in a current murder case involving numerous defendants who must be separated.

If projections of potential bed space needs in 20 years prove accurate, Lawrence County will need to expand in the future. But the design will make those expansions easier and more affordable – something the existing jail does not allow. The site and design should allow two 96-bed expansions in the decades to come.

The new facility should also:

- ✓ provide a safer, more secure environment for staff and inmates alike;
- ✓ be designed for efficient use of staff, which is crucial in this difficult labor market;
- ✓ provide more pandemic-related safeguards;
- ✓ bring law enforcement services under one roof rather than spread among three buildings, allowing for other efficiencies; and
- ✓ provide ample room for expansion.