

Overcrowding plagues county jail

First in a series on Lane County jails.

By KEN HASWELL
Of the Emerald

As many as four inmates at the Lane County jail have been crammed into two-man cells and every night somewhere between 70 and 80 inmates are sleeping on the floor.

The Lane County jail has been overcrowded for the past two years, says Lane County Corrections Superintendent Capt. Paul Bailey.

"It's consistently staying that way, with the count ranging from 220 to 230, depending upon the particular day, and with bed space for 148," he says.

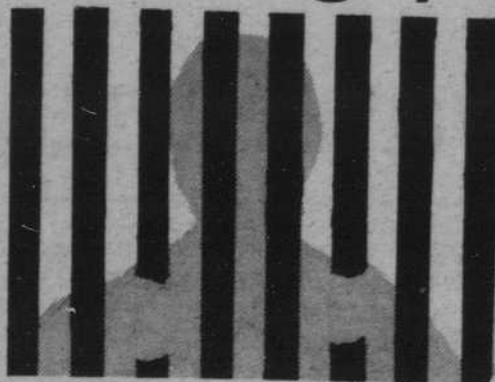
In the May 1976 general election, Lane County turned down 10-year bonds for construction of a five-story Adult Corrections Center. That faculty could have helped resolve overcrowding.

Lane County officials went to work on another ballot measure. With hopes of bringing the living conditions in the old jail up to present federal standards, they came up with a measure for the November 1976 election.

The November measure was a revision of the initial measure with a lower price tag for county taxpayers. It asked county voters for permission to issue bonds for nearly \$9 million to remodel the present jail and to build a new one on adjacent land.

County officials knew that Lane County needed a new jail and those officials were willing to work with less to improve the living conditions within the old jail.

Instead of the original five-story jail that was proposed initially, county officials cut costs and asked for a two-story jail. The November measure was approved. Construction of the two-story building is now underway and is



Graphic by Tom Ettel

scheduled for completion in March.

It appears, however, that the plans for a five-story structure have not been forgotten. Recently, the Lane County Budget Committee approved plans to build a third floor to the new jail, and earlier this month, the county commissioners authorized the sale of approved but unissued general obligation bonds to add the new floor.

It's costing the county an estimated \$2.2 million for the third floor. Voters approved \$8.9 million in bonds for the jail, but the commissioners only issued \$7.5 million. They promised to use Oregon and California timber receipts (federal revenues made in lieu of paying county property taxes) to cover the rest of the construction costs.

Construction of the third floor will allow space for an additional 96 inmates, bringing the total capacity of the new facility up to 227 inmates.

Still Bailey expects overcrowding. Bailey says apparently the trend across the nation is for new institutions to fill up rather quickly. This places a strain on the institution for bed space which, in turn, causes the institution to only lock up offenders committing the more serious crimes, he says.

Bailey adds that if the taxpayer wants every person who commits a crime to be locked up, then the taxpayers will have to make some hard and fast decisions

on whether to build new institutions to house those individuals.

Acting General Administrator Stan Biles says that the county does not have the money to build the fourth and fifth floors, but he agrees with both Bailey and the building's architects, Don Lutes and Ron Sanetel of Springfield, that the county does need all five floors to alleviate overcrowding and that, due to rising construction costs, the county could save money by building the top three floors all at once. Each of the three floors would add room for an additional 96 inmates.

No one in the county is really sure of just why the jail population is rising but Bailey says the rise is in direct proportion to the rise in Lane County's population.

The Commissioners last week agreed to a proposal by board chairman Jerry Rust to call a meeting of those involved in the criminal justice system to discuss the overcrowding of the jail as well as possible solutions.

Rust says a \$25,000 grant from the Law Enforcement Administration Agency will enable the commissioners "to get a definitive, mathematical breakdown as to who is affecting that system."

The commissioners are working in conjunction with John Potter, program manager for the criminal justice system, who says his office is presently at work on an evaluation of the county's criminal justice system to determine if the influx of inmates is caused by the system itself or other reasons. He says that report should be out next month.

Adverse living conditions and overcrowding in the old jail caused eight jail inmates to file law suits against Lane County Sheriff David Burkes and jail superintendent Bailey last April.

Among the charges made in the suit were complaints that medical attention is inadequate, the jail is overcrowded, the jail does not conform to building

codes and that inmates are given insufficient exercise periods and a lack of sunlight.

Besides the eight inmates who filed suit, Lane County Legal Aid threatened to sue last spring to alleviate the adverse conditions in the 65-year-old building.

Shortly after the non-profit legal aid service threatened suit, the Lane County Commissioners unanimously approved a \$28,000 expenditure for improvements to the old county jail.

Eugene Police Capt. John Rutledge, who was superintendent of the county jail from July 1972 to June 1973, says that the "condition of the old building is in such bad repair that I feel that there is no point in trying to pour any more money into such a poor facility."

Bailey agrees that it would be a waste to put any more money into the old jail, but he also says that people have to live in the building until the new jail is completed and therefore a certain amount of money has to be spent on improvements.

He says that when the fourth floor of the new jail is built — although it has not yet been determined how it will be paid for — the old jail must be torn down to comply with city building codes. Bailey says that space now occupied by the old jail must be turned into parking space.

Rutledge says, "I think it should be torn down. I think that the money would be better spent in improving the new facilities."

"The old building, when I worked there at least, certainly would have been very expensive to try and bring it up to a humane, liveable standard and I don't see much hope for that. And a great deal of money has been put into the building in recent years, and quite frankly, I don't see that it's much better than when I worked there in 1972," Rutledge says.

"I still think that the facility is not a very humane place to keep people."

Reformers oppose prison for non-violent offenders

By LORRAINE NELSON
Of the Emerald

Lane County Commissioner Jerry Rust, in an attempt to pinpoint the cause of the persistent overcrowding in the county jail, has organized a meeting with county criminal justice officials in January.

While Rust and his cohorts debate the inefficiencies (or efficiencies) of the court system, and while county officials struggle with a new jail that may not be large enough to alleviate overcrowded conditions, a national organization continues to profess its belief in what could be an answer to all the county's problems.

Michael Crow, coordinator of the National Moratorium on Prison Construction, says his organization's anti-prison stance is based on the theory that the United States puts more people in prison than any other nation besides South Africa.

Crow labels the effect of the U.S. prison system as "debilitating" and says that rehabilitation in the prisons is non-existent because the two are "mutually exclusive."

Crow says that 90 percent of all prisoners in the federal system and 60 to 75 percent of all prisoners in state prisons are non-violent property offenders. The NMPC would like to see those prisoners released, depopulating the jails for the violent minority and giving that minority some chance for rehabilitation.

For the released prisoners, the NMPC advocates reliance upon community services, restitution and fines based on income. Crow points to Holland's one-to-one relationship between a probation officer and a "client" as a model for what the U.S. could be doing.

Dick Goertzen, who supervises a state parole and probation unit in Lane County, says the county has 18 caseload officers working with about 331 parolees and 924 probationers.

Laurel Paulson is a job developer and counseling coordinator for Sponsors Inc., a

Eugene-based non-profit organization formed in 1974 to ease the transition of ex-prisoners into society.

Paulson, who has taught race and ethnic relations and sociology of women to prisoners at the Oregon State Penitentiary, advocates taking the employees of the prison system and giving them jobs working with offenders on a one-to-one basis.

"If we could only somehow organize these institutions to both punish and somehow help people adjust to society, develop skills or something to that effect," Paulson says. "We have minimal training, but yet that training is really a form of labor exploitation."

"We have this word rehabilitation and yet there really is no such thing," she says.

In 1977, the state prison system shifted away from a rehabilitation model to a punishment model, according to Neil Chambers, an executive assistant at the Oregon State Correctional Division.

Chambers contends that state institutions exist to first protect the public from people convicted judges of felonies and to then make provisions for individuals to improve themselves.

Reflecting this shift is a change in parole board policy. The early mission of the board, before 1973, was to select for release those prisoners most likely to succeed. Now the board selects those least likely to succeed and rejects them.

Selection of prisoners for release is not based on good behavior, but instead a matrix system is used.

A committed offender is categorized according to factors about his or her criminal background, and then charted against the offense committed. A pre-determined release date has been set by the parole board where these two factors are met.

The board has discretion concerning the release date, but good behavior, Chamber says, will not affect that date.

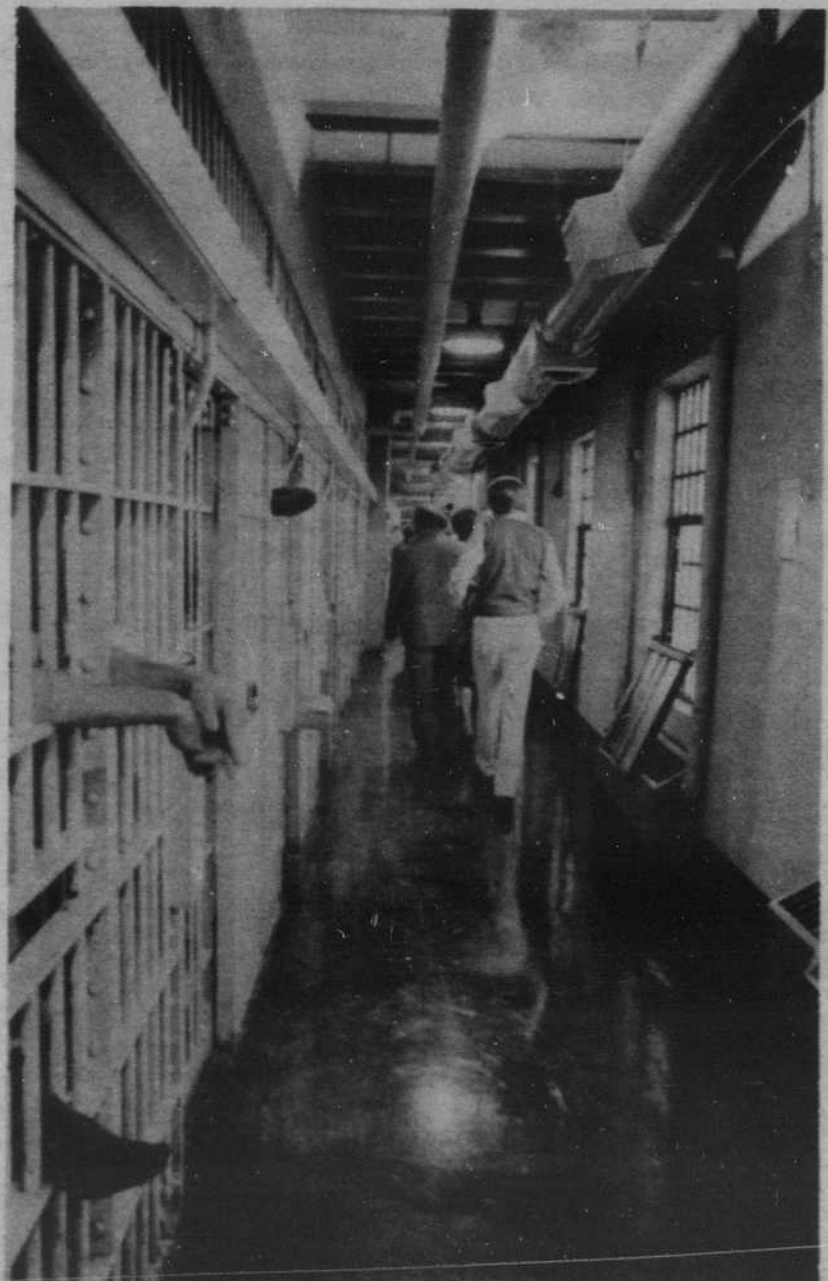


Photo courtesy of Springfield News

There are four prisoners living in cells built for two in the old county jail. Eighty prisoners sleep on mattresses on the floor some nights. And Lane County's new jail may not be able to hold all the prisoners, unless funding can be found to construct a fourth floor. A national group says the county and other jurisdictions could solve their prison problems by not jailing non-violent prisoners.