



Genesee County worries over flooding county jail if Flint city lockup reopens

Published: Sunday, February 20, 2011, 12:00 PM Updated: Monday, February 21, 2011, 10:24 AM



By **Ron Fonger** | Flint Journal

GENESEE COUNTY -- The last time the city of Flint reopened its police lockup, it funneled so many fresh suspects into an already packed county jail that it created an overcrowding emergency and forced the early release other inmates.

Four years later -- with city voters considering a new **2-mill property tax** to pay for reopening and operating the lockup again -- county officials are worried that history may be about to repeat itself.



Robert Pickell

"There's nothing that's been worked out on this thing," county Sheriff Robert Pickell said. "I talked to the mayor very briefly and said, I'm concerned about the jail (and) overcrowding. He said, We'll work something out.

"I've got to have something worked out," the sheriff said.

The Flint Journal could not reach Flint Mayor Dayne Walling for comment this week and county Board Chairman Jamie Cutis expressed frustration about how difficult it's been to reach key officials in city hall because of Flint's financial crisis.

"We need to get together and work it out ... What they need to do is put a task force together with the mayor, city council, the judges and sheriff and really critique (the plan or) you are going to cause one in, one out," Curtis said.

Pickell has bad memories about former mayor Don Williamson's decision to reopen the city lockup in 2007 after a weekend in which four people were killed.

Prior to 2007, the lockup had been closed since 1981 except having been opened briefly under former mayor Woodrow Stanley.

After the lockup opened, the county started getting as many as 20 new suspects at a time from the city -- a

recipe for disaster because the county jail was already over capacity on most days.

If the county jail population exceeds 580 inmates for more than a week, the sheriff is required to release inmates until that number is reduced.

The city lockup has a capacity of 120, but police can only hold prisoners there up to 72 hours. By holding suspects overnight, however, police have time to get them to a district court and a judge can order them to the county jail.

Pickell already has a jail admission policy designed to avoid overcrowding. The policy automatically accepts those arrested for various felony crimes, including drug distribution, fresh assaultive spouse abuse and stalking-type crimes, and residential and commercial breaking and entering.

Creating more long-term jail space led Pickell to suggest housing some inmates at the Midland County Jail, but neither the city nor the county appear ready to foot the bill.

Curtis said the county also believes Midland County jail officials would be very selective on the type of inmates they would be willing to accept.

He said he's not urging city residents how to vote on the city jail millage but said residents should know "there are consequences to opening the jail, just like there's consequences" to it remaining closed.

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