

Visalia Times-Delta

Tulare County supervisors OK seeking \$60m for new Porterville-area jail

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The Tulare County Board of Supervisors has authorized Sheriff Bill Wittman to apply for a \$60 million state grant to fund construction of a new 200-bed jail in the Porterville area.

Wittman, along with sheriff's Capt. Robin Skyles, told the supervisors Tuesday that the proposed jail is needed because the number of people that the county has to incarcerate is growing, particularly since the state began Oct. 1 to send low-risk offenders and parolees to county jails instead of state prison.

As of Tuesday morning, Tulare County jails had 67 state prisoners — people convicted of non-violent, non-sexual, non-serious crimes and called "non-non-nons" — and 90 other people held for suspected state parole violations.

So far, Tulare County has managed to keep up with the influx of added inmates because it had 234 unused beds at the Adult Pre-trial Facility north of Visalia when the realignment started.

Wittman said there are still about 100 unused beds available.

"So far, we haven't needed to release anyone early," Wittman told the supervisors.

That likely will change once the realignment plan is fully implemented in about four years because the county will have to contend with an estimated 540 non-non-nons who need to be incarcerated at any given time.

"We're going to have to have another 300 beds," Wittman said.

For now, he said, his department wants to build a two-story, 200-bed facility in the Porterville area that could eventually expand into a 350-bed facility. It could be ready to occupy four years after money from the state is committed.

Currently, the county operates four jails with the following capacities:

^a Main Jail: 264 beds

^a Bob Wiley Detention Facility: †366 beds

^a Pre-trial Facility: 384 beds

^a Men's Correctional Facility: 302 beds currently available.

Wittman said he can't use a

64-bed section of the Men's Correctional Facility, which opened in the 1940s, because it has a leaky roof, mold and damage caused by flooding earlier this year.

His department can't pay for the renovations and repairs to make it habitable.