

Frequently Asked Questions about the
Justice Millage Ballot Proposal

Q: What is the County asking its voters to consider?

A: The County is requesting that the voters consider a millage that would replace the current county jail, the Sheriff's administrative offices and court facilities located in Mason. This construction would be financed with bonds which would be paid for by the proceeds of the millage over the next 20 years. The County is also requesting additional programming funds over the same time period in order to expand services that would treat substance addictions and mental illness at the jail, and also to reduce re-incarceration among arrested persons.

Q: How much will this millage cost me, as a taxpayer?

A: A taxpayer who owns a home with a value of \$100,000 (\$50,000 taxable value) will see an increase of \$42.50 annually.

Q: How will the \$70.1 million in construction costs be spent?

A: The \$70.1 million construction estimate is broken down as follows; \$37 million for the jail; \$15.7 million for the Sheriff's administrative offices; \$8.8 million for the 55th District Court; \$2.4 million for one Circuit Court courtroom and offices; and \$6.2 million for site development.

Q: Why can't the County pay for this project out of its current budget?

A: Current revenues, the greatest single source being property taxes, are not increasing at a high enough rate to add any ongoing expenses to the Ingham County budget. With the current revenue stream, the County has been spending down its reserves in order to maintain current services. This situation has been exacerbated by a roughly \$2 million increase in required retirement benefit contributions.

Q: Why does the County need a new jail?

A: Modern regulations and changes in inmate population have made the current building obsolete. The maintenance of the current building and the immediate repairs needed would cost millions of dollars over the next few years and the building will still need to be replaced. Major repairs are needed just to keep the building operating safely for the employees and the inmates housed in the facility. Investing in repairing the deteriorating building and then building a new facility in the future would cost taxpayers more overall.

Q: How old is the jail?

A: The current building is 54 years old. It was built in 1964 and is still in use today. Major renovations were done in 1984 and 2004.

Q: Why can't we just add on or renovate?

A: The long-term cost to renovate is higher than to build a new facility. Renovating would be short sighted and would only postpone the need for a complete replacement. Renovation also does not provide for modern efficiency in utilities nor would a renovation ensure compliance with current Federal and State regulations.

Q: Why not build the new justice complex in Lansing?

A: The County will save \$4-\$5 million dollars by using the existing kitchen and laundry facilities in Mason. The land in Mason is also owned by the County so there would be no expense to acquire the site. Furthermore, a City of Lansing site consideration would increase costs by up to \$7 million for parking and other related details to the site. Mason is also geographically located in the center of the County.

Q: How has the inmate population changed over the past several years?

A: The increased amount of individuals suffering from mental health issues or substance abuse addictions in County Jails across the country has increased dramatically. In addition, new regulations require a separation of juveniles (16 and under) and youthful offenders (17) from adult inmates.

Q: What additional programming will be offered if the millage is approved?

A: A new jail complex design would allow for additional mental health, substance abuse, educational and therapeutic programs for a larger portion of the inmate population.

Q: How will a new jail complex help released inmates re-enter the community and be productive members of society?

A: Several of the jail programs that will be expanded with additional funding are programs that prepare the individual for successful re-entry into the community, including educational and job training opportunities.

Q: Why is replacement of the 55th District Court being included in this proposal?

A: The current 55th District Court is too small and has several functional problems because of the size and layout of the building. The current facility is 12,250 square feet. Ideally, the facility should be closer to 28,000 square feet to accommodate the number of Ingham County residents who visit the Court each day. From an efficiency standpoint, it makes sense to address this capital need at the same time the County is replacing the Jail. The new District Court will also be designed to increase the efficiency and safety of transporting inmates between the Court and the Jail.

Q: Why is it being proposed that the 30th Circuit Court courtroom currently housed in the Historic Mason Courthouse be relocated to the new justice complex?

A: Due to the age of the historical building, there are multiple issues regarding safety and maintenance, including; public access to the defendants as they are escorted into and out of the building puts defendants and law enforcement at risk; security is limited in the building, there are no security cameras, no x-ray machine to screen bags or packages, and easy access to the Judge and staff from the public; and building mechanical systems are not designed to control the indoor temperatures consistently and evenly through the third floor due to the age of the building. Building a courtroom adjacent to the jail will result in safety improvements and transportation savings that cannot be realized at the courtroom's current location. The new Circuit Court courtroom will also be designed to increase the efficiency and safety of transporting inmates between the Court and the Jail.

Q: When will construction on the new facility begin? When will it be completed?

A: Following the design and planning stage, construction would likely start in spring 2020. Completion of construction is anticipated at the end of 2021 at the earliest. It should be noted that expanded programming would not need to wait for the construction of the complex, and implementation of new and expanded programming could begin in January 2019.