



ALBEMARLE-CHARLOTTESVILLE REGIONAL JAIL

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Colonel Martin Kumer
Superintendent

RENOVATION / EXPANSION STAFF INTERVIEWS

1. Do you think a renovation / expansion is necessary?

- a. Yes, the current state of the facility as a whole is in dire need of a renovation, and upkeep. The building is unsafe to staff, and inmates alike. The current level of disrepair across the facility especially in places like ground floor are alarming.
- b. I believe that the renovation is absolutely necessary. The original sections of ACRJ are old and outdated, and need far more than a HVAC system. The current special management housing at ACRJ is in dire condition. Option 3 would provide more livable circumstances for the individuals who need to be housed there. I have learned that there are people who need to be in special management housing; whether it is to protect them from other inmates, work on stabilizing their mental health, or to protect staff and inmates from them. Regardless of the reason, they deserve humane conditions and in providing such with option 3, improve the chances of keeping staff safe as well.
- c. I believe the renovation / expansion is necessary at ACRJ because the building is outdated and could use several upgrades to improve officer and inmate safety. One issue we currently have is that there are not enough areas in the jail where mental health/segregation inmates can be housed. When there are several inmates that have nowhere to be housed in the jail they get housed in intake which affects the intake officer's job. I have worked in intake for the last couple of years and there have been many times where it is busy with a log of new arrestees being committed to jail but there wasn't enough space in intake due to the number of individuals being housed for mental health or other segregation reasons. Many times, there are several inmates banging or kicking for various reasons due to mental health which pulls the officer from their normal intake duties. Having a designated floor for mental health / segregation inmates would solve the issue of running out of cells in intake, create more segregation space and a new era for inmates on suicide watch.
- d. If/when these renovations happen, it is going to create a much better work environment for everyone within the jail. Having a mental health wing would be the most important part of the renovation. It would also be a big morale boost amongst staff in the building.
- e. I believe this renovation / expansion is very much needed. When people are arrested and brought to jail, we do not always have the best location or space for them to meet their needs. With a new mental health housing block, they will be able to have better access to mental health staff and other staff who would be able to help them when needed. It would also allow for more recreational areas for the facility to utilize.

- f. The renovation / expansion of the jail would integrate positive change towards compassionate housing for inmates and a positive working environment for staff. Renovations would create a higher quality work environment between inmates and staff by advancing positive, modern, clean less chaotic and more organized living spaces. Inmates constantly complain about the number of people in the block and how they cannot go outside in addition to the HVAC issues. The public needs to be cognizant to the struggles of those incarcerated as well as the employees and understand the jail is like a 2nd home to the security shift staff as well as medical providers when you consider they are here for 12 hrs./day.
- g. I do find it necessary to renovate because as a medical provider I can testify to the fact that the current jail is not ADA compliant. The pods are wheelchair friendly, however, there is not enough security staff for those areas. We recently had an inmate that had to be housed in medical for 5 weeks in a cell alone because it is ADA compliant.
- h. Regardless of your perspective, it is clear that the physical integrity of the jail requires a great deal of maintenance to continue providing basic living conditions for our inmates. Heating and cooling, pest control, air and water quality, electrical components, and basic cleanliness of the building have deteriorated over the decades which requires us to consider how best to address these problems . In addition to the physical structure, the psychological impact of living in a cramped and outdated environment must be considered as we discuss the impact that a renovation will have upon the inmates who reside within these walls.

2. Do you think it will have an impact on you as an individual and will it help you perform your duties?

- a. As a psychiatric provider at ACRJ, I have a direct impact upon the health and well-being of inmates, but there are limitations as to what I can accomplish. Some of these restrictions are due to the physical impact of the environment, but there are also many individuals who require additional treatment and support which cannot be provided appropriately at the jail in its current state. Inmates suffering from severe mental health illness frequently end up at ACRJ for various reasons and then cannot easily be transferred to state hospitals for treatment. Our ability to provide safe and therapeutic treatment for these inmates is essential to maintain integrity and dignity both for them and our values as an institution and community. Even inmates struggle with normal day-to-day troubles challenge us to provide opportunities for growth and healing, and I believe funding that invests in the well-being of our inmates and jail staff will transfer beyond these walls into more promising futures for us all.
- b. Yes. Anyone with mental health issues, we currently don't have great options to place those individuals in the jail. Having a block dedicated to housing anyone with mental health needs would be great.
- c. With some of our more volatile, paranoid or otherwise unstable inmates, it makes more sense for me to go to them for medical reasons. Currently, I have to go to areas where it is nearly impossible to examine them due to the lack of lighting. The entryway into the blocks are extremely narrow, making it impossible to bring a computer on wheels to help document the encounter. I think it will have a positive

impact on the employees because they currently have to take care of inmates who are living in outdated and deplorable conditions who already have many reasons to be unhappy and be at odds with staff.

- d. Yes, the more that is done, the better. Getting rid of bars and replacing them with doors that have windows are a vast improvement and protects the officers and medical staff.
- e. I believe it will have an impact on myself and other staff and how we perform our job duties. Office space is a commodity and with an increase in staff since the original section was built, there are offices that were converted from closets. There are some offices on eastside that the staff occupying them to coordinate with each other in order to use their electronics in order to prevent tripping the breaker. It will help me perform my duties as I try to ensure we are meeting Board of Local and Regional Jails and Prison Rape Elimination Act standards. Option 3 will improve our meeting PREA standards as the architects take PREA into consideration in the design.
- f. I believe the renovation / expansion will help with our daily job duties. Currently with Mental Health inmates being housed in areas that they should not be housed, a large portion of our workday is spent reaching out to mental health, attempting to help inmates in their time of need along with our multiple other job duties.
- g. As an employee at ACRJ the inmates constantly complain about the number of people in the block, how they cannot go outside, see daylight and mention how hot and/or cold it is in the blocks in addition to plumbing issues, due to an antiquated HVAC and plumbing system. The HVAC never seems to work properly in the cells or in staff offices. I constantly have to run a space heater due to having a large hole in my ceiling that lets in cold air from the duct work. The staff toilets do not work well and we do not have hot water in the staff bathroom while the cold water hardly trickles out. This is all on the eastside of the jail where renovations are being discussed. The public needs to be cognizant to the struggles of those incarcerated and the employees and understand it's like a 2nd home to the majority of staff due to most shifts being 12 hours a day for officers and medical providers.

3. Do you think it will have an impact on inmates and visitors?

- a. The positive impact it will have on inmates in our custody will be a monumental one. Regardless of the alleged crimes, they deserve clean and sanitary living conditions. As it stands now, we are not meeting those needs adequately due to a multitude of factors. I am unsure how it will impact visitors, but the changes that are slated to be made will be positive.
- b. I think people visiting their loved ones are going to feel better knowing that their loved ones are in a space with modern ventilation, good lighting, sunlight, wide doors, and potential access to being outside. The inmates will appreciate being in modern cells without jail bars. Jail bars make people feel like they are being caged in. They also discourage visibility depending on what angle you are looking in to the block. Taking the bars out would make it feel more like a dorm rather than a jail. They would be on observation rather than caged-in. For some inmates, it would make all the difference. Realistically, some will remain the way they are and will continue to have mental health relapses no matter what.
- c. Yes, the renovation will impact inmates and visitors. The most obvious impact being more inmates will have access to therapeutic housing. There are currently inmates

who may not see daylight at all which I can't even imagine what that does to someone's mental health. Option 3 will allow for outside recreation so not only will they see daylight, but breathe fresh air. I think that inmates are often a forgotten part of the population and even more so are the family members of those who are incarcerated. They are the ones who have to keep life going while the family member is incarcerated, and they are the people who fund their existence, and field their complaints. Option 3 will create more visitation areas and easier layout to get to them so hopefully families will have more opportunities to visit with their incarcerated family members. Improvements to ACRJ are making it the Hilton, and improving conditions isn't saying you support incarceration either. It is saying you support better conditions for the people who are here.

- d. The renovations would upgrade the current living spaces for the inmates such as the size of the dayroom, eating and sleeping areas. Currently, the jail still has a lot of bars. Taking the bars out would create more room in the blocks for the inmates and make it safer for officers when doing rounds. The jail currently does not have an outdoor rec area for inmates. There have been so many times I have heard the inmates say they wish they could just get some fresh air when they have rec. Several of the inmates take the opportunity to go to rec when it is their turn because it gives them time away from their cell and they can exercise, play basketball or just enjoy walking around. Having a secure outdoor rec area would promote mental health and overall well-being.
- e. Yes, for the inmates to be held in a newly built block instead of one from 50 years ago would be a needed improvement. Visitors would have a more purpose built lobby and entrance and visitor booths.
- f. This renovation/expansion will give more housing options to inmates. This will allow inmates to have an easier time during their incarceration. Inmates with mental health issues will have better access to the staffing they need along with more time out of their cell. With mental inmates having more time out of their cells, staff will be able to watch their behavior better, which should help staff relay information regarding an inmate's behavior.
- g. For some inmates, jail saved their life and is the most stable residence they have. They receive 3 meals a day, sleep in a safe environment, are free from daily drug temptation, and can obtain medical/mental health services they wouldn't use on the streets. Many inmates have said if they had not been arrested & removed from their negative environment, they would be dead from an overdose. Their living conditions need to be improved. It is inhumane to expect individuals incarcerated 24/7 to live in a low lit, unkempt, dreary cell, surrounded by bars which most likely affects their mental health. It is no surprise that some individuals act out, complain and exhibit mood disorders due to such a poor living environment.

4. Any other opinion/information you would like to share.

- a. Other issues within the jail is the HVAC systems. With the system being so outdated the temperatures are constantly having to be reset by maintenance because it is either too hot or too cold in the blocks. Updating the HVAC systems would resolve most of those issues along with the quality of air in the building.
- b. I have read community opinions about being opposed to renovations because they feel the money would be better served addressing mental needs in the community.

It's frustrating because I don't understand why it has to be one or the other. We should increase options for those with mental health needs/issues in the community. But the jail needs to be renovated. It is not glamorous, but communities need jails. People are going to continue to be arrested and must be held somewhere. Wouldn't you rather have members of your community end up in a facility that has been recently renovated to better serve their needs? If you care about all members and aspects of your community, then you should desire for them to be housed in better facilities.

- c. I agree that more money should be invested in mental health resources the community as well as reentry services, education for adults, vocational training, housing assistance, parenting skills, healthy relationships, leaving gangs / community violence and the list goes on. People generally don't become incarcerated solely because of mental health issues. If we as a community are not investing in all of these areas, we can plan to continue to see people committing crimes and become incarcerated. Even if we are investing extra money in mental health services in the community that is not waving a magic wand that will end all people committing crimes. People make their own choices regardless of resources and circumstances and we will continue to see people become incarcerated. The individuals who "live" here at ACRJ for however long or short a period of time, they deserve better. There is a reason that the Board of Local and Regional Jails have the standards of living that we are trying to meet. The days of "lock them up and throw away the key" are gone and we need to catch up. I believe if the average person was to spend any time here on eastside, they would agree that the arrangements are substandard. People often talk about how inmates aren't just inmates, but failing to approve Option 3 says exactly that. This is not just a money decision, it is a decision saying that inmates here deserve to live in more humane conditions. As a tax paying citizen of Albemarle County who works hard for my money, I absolutely support improving the conditions for the people who have to stay here as outlined in Option 3.
- d. There will always be a need for a jail. There are people who are in here who I can attest are a danger to others and sometimes a danger to themselves. We are a huge community receptacle for people in mental crisis. Their actions have often been formed by the things that have happened to them, along with the neglect or the torment they faced growing up in the world. With that said, this jail is 50 years old. It is used all day every. There is never down time in this building. Everywhere I go in the old part of the jail, there is a mop bucket out catching a leak. There are dead and dying cockroaches. There are dry wall holes that never get fixed because there are too many other things that need fixing. Let's upgrade the jail we have and make it a more humane and safe environment and have it match the high standards we set for the rest of this city.