

Study Offers Relief for Crowded New Jail

Consultant Says New Jail Could Have Been Avoided

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EVERETT Snohomish County may have been too hasty in breaking ground on its new jail and should have tried to reduce jail population first, a consultant told the Snohomish County Council yesterday.

The consultant, Alan Kalmanoff, blamed the overcrowding in the Snohomish County jail on communication problems among county departments and a lack of management. The jail, built in the 1980s to house 277 inmates, now houses more than 700, many of whom sleep on the floor because there aren't enough beds.

The council last spring agreed to pay Kalmanoff \$140,000 to conduct an efficiency study of the county's criminal-justice system. Plans for a new jail were already under way when a new Republican majority emerged on the council last fall and later ordered the study.

In the draft study released yesterday, Kalmanoff said the county is building a jail with too many medium- and maximum-security cells. He said the county could save money by creating more minimum-security capacity in the jail, which will be completed in late 2004 or early 2005.

Kalmanoff said the County Council has taken "a piecemeal approach" to dealing with the criminal-justice system. He criticized County Executive Bob Drewel for not taking a "clear and decisive position" on jail overcrowding. He applauded Drewel's proposal in the 2003 budget to impose a jail population cap. But, Kalmanoff said, the county should have done that and more sooner.

County officials pointed out that some of Kalmanoff's recommendations were out of the county's jurisdiction. The County Council can't, for example, control whom the Everett Police Department arrests.

Some officials were skeptical of Kalmanoff's findings.

"I think he may be overly optimistic when he says he can reduce it (jail population) by so much," said Councilman Dave Gossett, D-Mountlake Terrace.

It's too late, Gossett said, to start over on the jail. But, he said, some of **Kalmanoff's ideas could reduce jail population over the next several years, so that the new jail won't be full the day it opens.**

Councilman Jeff Sax, R-Snohomish, said Kalmanoff's findings should prompt the council to rethink the jail.

"We just need to have the conversation about what kind of jail we're going to build," he said.

Susan Neely, law and justice specialist in Drewel's office, questioned Kalmanoff's jail-population figures.

Kalmanoff criticized the county for building a jail with nearly 75 percent medium- and maximum-security cells when the jail houses mostly minimum-security prisoners. But Neely said her data shows only 25 percent of the jail's current population is minimum-security.

The County Council and its Law and Justice Committee have until Nov. 6 to comment on Kalmanoff's study. He will then submit a final report to the council.