

## Even More to Consider About the Proposed Justice Center

I have some issues with the way justice is dispensed in Johnson County. If I had my way, nobody would ever be arrested for petty, nonviolent, victimless crimes, and the racial disparity incarceration issue would be analyzed and addressed. I'll help move this agenda along any way I can.

But I'm not going to hold the proposed Justice Center hostage while I do it.

Even the No Voters agree that our current facilities are grossly inadequate but want to separate a larger jail from the other improvements. I was surprised to discover that the new jail itself comprises only about one-third of the total project cost, most of which is going towards expanded courtroom space, offices, site work and parking.

Perversely, the fate of the Justice Center is now in the hands of the people who are arguably the least familiar with it and least directly affected by it; that would be us, the great unwashed law-abiding masses. But it's our money, so thankfully we have a say in this great country of ours.

Who would be punished by a No Vote? The people who are directly impacted by our sadly outdated facilities are the ones being arrested, their families and the ones tasked with processing and storing them. Not to mention you and I, who are footing the over \$1 million *per year* bill to pay neighboring counties for overflow services.

That's why this is such a tough sell. The Vote Yes folks need to convince at least 60% of the voting public to voluntarily increase their taxes to support an infrastructure project that is practically invisible to them. A more expensive version failed approval by only a few percentage points last November, and the Vote Yes camp hopes to do a better job getting the word out this time around.

There is no room in an article of this length to address all of the issues raised by the No Voters. They are throwing a lot of things against the wall in the hopes that some of it will stick, and are having some success.

Check out their web site at [www.votenojusticecenter.org](http://www.votenojusticecenter.org). I actually agree with some of their concerns, but also found myself asking, “how is voting down this project going to address this particular problem?” Most of the questions they raise are answered on the Vote Yes site at [www.icjusticecenter.com](http://www.icjusticecenter.com).

Some No Voters are afraid that if the overcrowding issue at the jail is addressed, their efforts to reduce the arrest rate in Johnson County will lose traction because the shoe no longer pinches. Even if there was some truth to that I don't see the current trends changing any time soon.

For those of you who wonder who is - or recently was - in our jail (or overflow jails), visit [www.johnson-county.com](http://www.johnson-county.com) and click on the Jail Inmate Roster. It's updated daily and includes names, ages and alleged violations (most have not appeared in court yet). It may surprise you.

A veritable Who's Who of community leaders support the Justice Center (see the web site), which some No Voters are trying to portray as a conspiracy perpetrated on a gullible electorate by the social and political elite.

A friend of mine - an attorney, oddly enough – adamantly refuses to voluntarily give any more money to what he calls the Johnson County Industrial Military Complex to help it perpetuate its policy of systematically incarcerating individuals for petty, nonviolent, victimless “crimes.” I can respect his principled (if Quixotic) stand, but he was somehow unswayed by my references to babies and bathwater.

Cutting to the chase, what's this all going to cost me? My own house is assessed at just under the median home sales price in Johnson County (about \$200,000), which means I can expect to pay an extra \$45 per year in property taxes if the bond issue is approved.

If it fails again, we can continue our time-honored policy of slapping on overpriced Band-Aid after Band-Aid, which (surprise!) is how we got to where we

are now. See for yourself – there are free public tours of the jail every Monday at 4 p.m. until Election Day.

I wish we didn't arrest so many people for dumb stuff. I wish we didn't appear to incarcerate minorities disproportionately. I wish Guinness Stout didn't have so many calories. Unfortunately, none of my wishes will be any closer to coming true by voting against the Justice Center.

Please vote Yes For Justice on May 7<sup>th</sup>.

*Writer's Group member Dave Parsons is a late addition to the Vote Yes for Justice Committee.*