

**SPLOST Questions Oct 22, 2014      Part 3**

**Q. Are there any other SPLOST projects that we have to make adjustments on because of lack of funding or other reasons?**

A. Yes, the jail. For example, we had one project listed as Jail Renovation and Expansion. Back in 2007 when we started planning SPLOST III, two years before SPLOST III actually began, the jail was extremely overcrowded and it was growing with new inmates each year. Methamphetamine was the drug of choice and arrests related to it was a large reason for the overcrowding of our jail.

**Q. Since our jail was only built and occupied in 2002, why is it already overcrowded?**

A. Our new jail had been grossly underbuilt and underfunded, and we saw no way except to try to expand the jail to keep up with the increasing inmate population. However, with the subsequent downswing of the meth problem and better cycling of prisoners through the legal system with the assistance of the DA and Judges, and Sheriff, we have not needed to spend the millions of dollars on the jail expansion, which would have also required hiring many new employees.

**Q. Is there any reason to expand our jail at this time?**

A. Absolutely not. Do we still have some crowding problems? Yes. But they are manageable and it is much less expensive to board some of them occasionally at another county jail at about half the cost of keeping them ourselves, rather than building a jail addition where there is inadequate property for that purpose.

**Q Are there other cost associated with expanding our jail?**

A. Oh, heck yes. Not the least of which is the cost of many new jail employees which could not be paid out of SPLOST but would require property tax increases. Because our current jail was built on the side of a mountain with no expansion room, the only area available for expansion is enclosing the small recreation cell block. It would cost over a million dollars and would only handle 16 additional beds. Then you have the problem of how to give the inmates outdoor recreation. The only other area remaining is adjacent to the jail and is where all the electrical grounding matting field is located. It can not be covered as the soil must remain moist in that area. So there are few options available for expansion, and building a new jail is completely out of the question.

In my opinion, we would be making a gross mistake expanding the jail at this time. This will not only be saving millions of dollars in construction and long term new employee cost, but allowing us to spend the remaining SPLOST money on projects that the public can enjoy and not wasting it on an unneeded jail expansion.

**Q. Is it still possible that the county will have to expand the jail?**

A. It certainly is some day, but you can rest assured that it will only be when things reach a critical situation, and that is not happening now and I do not see it in the foreseeable future. The current jail was built on the side of the mountain with absolutely NO room for any significant expansion. We have spent SPLOST funds on security upgrades and replaced all HVAC units (11 I think). The current administration is making it a priority to reduce the jail population and it is working. We are continuing to make improvements and repairs, but for now an expansion is not necessary.