

Steele and Rice County Jail Collaboration Considerations

4/16/2021

Background

When initially constructed in 2003, the Steele County Detention Center was intended to serve as a regional detention facility to house inmates from multiple jurisdictions. While the regional concept seemed to work initially, it never really seemed to reach its full potential. Currently, the detention center is operating at less than 50% capacity.

With an objective in mind to operate the detention center as efficiently as possible, the Steele County Board commissioned a Criminal Justice System Analysis & Detention Center Forecast study in late, 2020, to determine the projected jail bed needs for Steele County inmates. This study provides a basis for future policy decisions related to the use of the detention center space. In addition, the study contains a space and operations assessment of the detention center. The study has been completed and Steele County is currently considering options for its unused jail beds and space.

It is our understanding that Rice County has been researching its options to bring the Rice County Jail into DOC compliance. The Rice County Jail and Law Enforcement Center Assessment and Feasibility Study was recently completed.

Rice and Steele County officials met informally on February 11th to share information and initiate some dialogue about a potential jail collaborative effort.

Steele County has also been gathering more information about regional jail agreements to see what other entities in MN are doing in this area.

Continuing Discussion Options

If Rice County is interested in continuing to explore any possible agreements or partnerships with Steele County related to the use of the Steele County Detention Center, Steele County is interested in discussing a possible joint venture. **Since both entities have completed studies recently, a logical next step might be to assess this information to see what, if any, type of interaction might be feasible.** At the April 20th joint meeting we can discuss what each county has done to date and if there is additional information that should be obtained to answer remaining questions about a potential collaboration.

Some potential options for collaboration between Rice and Steele County are:

1. **Boarding Agreement to house Rice County inmates at the Steele County Detention Center**
 - a. This could range from a standard boarding agreement to one that provides more commitment on the part of both parties
2. **Regional Jail Authority Joint Powers Agreement**
 - a. Minn. Stat §§641.261 to 641.266 and 471.59 authorize two or more counties to establish a “regional jail” (RJ) and “regional jail board” (RJB) to oversee its operation. A joint powers agreement (JPA) would identify the members’ respective responsibilities and clarify discretionary items. Essentially, the same legal requirements exist for ongoing operation of a regional jail as do for a county jail.

If there is interest in exploring these options, Steele County would be willing to participate in more focused and intentional discussions with Rice County.