

RESOLUTION

NO. R-20-308

CITY HALL: September 17, 2020

BY: COUNCILMEMBERS WILLIAMS AND GISLESON PALMER

WHEREAS, a new Phase III jail facility will cost an estimated \$51 million to build plus over \$8 million per year to operate; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 global pandemic has had a devastating impact on the finances of the City and thousands of its residents; and

WHEREAS, specifically, the City relies heavily on the taxes and economic activity associated with tourism, conventions, and special events to provide essential services to its residents, but the COVID-19 global pandemic has severely disrupted these lifelines, forcing large event cancellations that continue to this day; and

WHEREAS, news reports estimate these disruptions will have a \$1.2 billion impact on the City; and

WHEREAS, given the enduring nature of this crisis, the City will have to make exceedingly difficult decisions about the services it can provide to its residents in the foreseeable future; and

WHEREAS, the average daily inmate population has dropped substantially from 2,645 in late 2012 to 1,160 in 2019, an astounding 56% decrease, with the daily count dipping as low as 776 in 2020; and

WHEREAS, the Council has consistently attempted through legislative and administrative processes to limit the jail structure to further the City's goal of safely reducing the jail population in an equitable and fiscally responsible manner; and

WHEREAS, the City has met and continues to meet its financial obligations under the Consent Decree, as evidenced by the City's financial contribution to jail operations that has increased 173% from about \$22 million in 2012 to an estimated \$59 million by the end of this year; and

WHEREAS, when all funding is accounted for, Orleans Parish spends approximately \$73,007 per inmate per year as compared to the less than \$50,000 spent per year by recently surveyed mid-size jails; and

WHEREAS, the City has also worked to complete a renovation to the Temporary Detention Center (TDC) to house the OJC's special populations, marking an additional \$6.27 million or more investment by the City in its jail facilities; and

WHEREAS, increased staff training, vastly upgraded facilities, as well as improved medical and mental health services through a provider experienced in treating inmate populations have substantially improved the conditions for those incarcerated at the OJC; and

WHEREAS, the City recognizes a dire local need for solutions to more appropriately treat those living with serious mental illness *outside* of jail settings, thereby reducing the undue burden this population places on our current justice system; however, a new Phase III facility would substantially hamper this worthy pursuit; and

WHEREAS, the previous Council's May 18, 2017 vote to instruct the City Planning Commission (CPC) to consider a conditional use to build Phase III was not a final action, as CPC was never provided plans and consequently could not perform the work; and

WHEREAS, given the substantial change in circumstances, a far more viable and fiscally responsible alternative is desperately desired; and

WHEREAS, the Council supports any viable and agreeable alternative plan(s) to all detainees with special mental health needs; **NOW THEREFORE**

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW ORLEANS, That the Council hereby requests that the City Attorney and Mayor’s Administration to thoroughly and expediently investigate the prudence of alternatives to Phase III, including a detailed comparison of cost, timeline, and aspirational quality care standards for the acute and sub-acute mentally ill population accounting for the requirements imposed by the United States Constitution; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Council specifically requests that the City Attorney and Mayor’s Administration make all reasonable and appropriate efforts in furtherance of any prudent alternative, including but not limited to the possibility of the Option 3 retrofit plans in the July 23, 2020 JFA report, as presented to the Council’s Criminal Justice Committee by national expert Dr. James Austin on September 10, 2020; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Clerk of Council shall submit copies of this Resolution to City Attorney Sunni LeBeouf and Mayor LaToya Cantrell upon its approval.

THE FOREGOING RESOLUTION WAS READ IN FULL, THE ROLL WAS CALLED ON THE ADOPTION THEREOF, AND RESULTED AS FOLLOWS:

YEAS:

NAYS:

ABSENT:

AND THE RESOLUTION WAS ADOPTED.