



BERKS COUNTY
CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

**VISIONING
WORKSHOP**

MAY 2022

VISIONING WORKSHOP

Overview

Local Jail and correctional facility best practices have changed significantly in recent decades. Shifting population numbers, national litigation, and the transformation in the needs and characteristics of those involved in the criminal justice system have dramatically altered the operations of local correctional facilities and systems. In the last decade alone, inmate population levels in most correctional systems have decreased due to criminal justice system reforms and the diversion of low-level offenders from incarceration. This, coupled with the increase in individuals with serious mental illnesses, has substantially altered the makeup of the correctional population leaving fewer, but more complex to manage incarcerated individuals.

Berks County is not immune to these changes. CGL has been contracted by the County to prepare an architectural program which will provide a roadmap to replace the existing Berks County Jail with a new Berks County Correctional Facility (BCCF) to meet the new project mission statement:

The Berks County Correctional Facility provides secure, safe and compassionate confinement of the temporarily incarcerated. We accomplish this by providing cost-efficient services focusing on rehabilitation, recidivism reduction and social restoration with an emphasis on education and self-improvement. Through evidence-based programming, those confined are more prepared to re-enter the community as law-abiding and productive citizens.

A ‘visioning workshop’ was used as an interactive forum to bring a wide range of stakeholders from the County of Berks together to develop a consensus for essential project goals, guidelines, and principles that would be used to guide the planning process. The visioning process was also designed to establish a positive foundation for open communication, cooperation, and participatory planning for all interested stakeholders. The documented results from the workshop describe a variety of technical guidelines and desired operating conditions that the planning team will use to identify options and ultimately a phased implementation plan for improvements.

The visioning workshop was held during a regularly scheduled project Steering Committee meeting with county stakeholders on **May 12, 2022**.

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List of Participants

| Name | Organization |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| Commissioner Barnhardt | Steering Committee |
| Warden Smith | Steering Committee |
| Ron Seaman | Steering Committee |
| Stephanie Weaver | Steering Committee |
| Robert Williams | Steering Committee |
| Jessica Blausen | Steering Committee |
| Commissioner. Leinbach | Prison Board |
| Commissioner Rivera | Prison Board |
| John Adams | Prison Board |
| Sandy Graffius | Prison Board |
| Angela Frantz | Prison Board |
| Scott Lash | Prison Board |
| Anne-Marie | Prison Board |
| Barbara Lopez | Prison Board |
| Glenn Welsh | Prison Board |
| Traci Rhoads | Jail Team |
| Stephanie Smith | Jail Team |
| Jeffrey Schearer | Jail Team |
| Miguel Castro | Jail Team |
| Glenn Spotts | Jail Team |
| Kelly Stumpf | Jail Team |
| Jessica Collins | Jail Team |
| Steve Weber | Courts |
| Trista Oxenreider | Courts |
| Carissa Johnson | Courts |
| MDJ Chieffo | Courts |
| Dan Heydt | Courts |
| Arthur Grim | Retired Courts |
| Steve Weber | Courts |
| Trista Oxenreider | Courts |
| Tiffany Himic | Berks County |
| Anne-Marie Yocum-Grill | Berks County |
| Jane Palmer Jane | Public Attendee |
| Crystal Kowalski | Public Attendee |
| Chloe Jaco | CGL |
| Brad Sassatelli | CGL |
| Bret Firfer | CGL |
| Brian Lee | CGL |
| Paul Vlnar | CGL |

Workshop Agenda

The agenda below was used for the workshop and the outcomes are summarized in this report. Session 1 addressed high level ideas revolving around themes related to industry advancements in the custody of persons in the justice system, while Session 2 focused more on laying the foundation for a new Berks County facility and the operational and space preferences.

Session 1 – “Sea Change”:

1. Introduction and Ground Rules
2. Impact of Existing Facility Conditions and Operations
3. Precedents
4. Operational Values
5. Trends
6. Project Goals

Session 2 – Berks County Vision:

7. Inmate Services and Programs
8. Visitors and Community
9. Staff
10. Housing
11. Other Project Goals and Objectives

sea change:

1. *archaic*: a change brought about by the sea

2. :a marked change: **TRANSFORMATION**

- Merriam-Webster

- Merriam-Webster

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Session 1 – “Sea Change”



Introduction

The CGL team built on the goal of thinking creatively ‘outside of the box’ by leading an exercise that began with a blue sky but led to a verbal map of realistic ideas. As part of introductions, each person in the room asked to provide their opinion about what would define a successful project for the county. The following list is summary of responses to the question: “The new Berks County Correctional Facility will be a success if...” grouped by theme:

Facility Planning Process

- Follow industry best practices
- Communication between stakeholders, transparency with the community
- Learn from unique ideas and opportunities in other jurisdictions

Site and Facility Issues

- Utilize the natural beauty of the site
- Design for future flexibility and adaptability

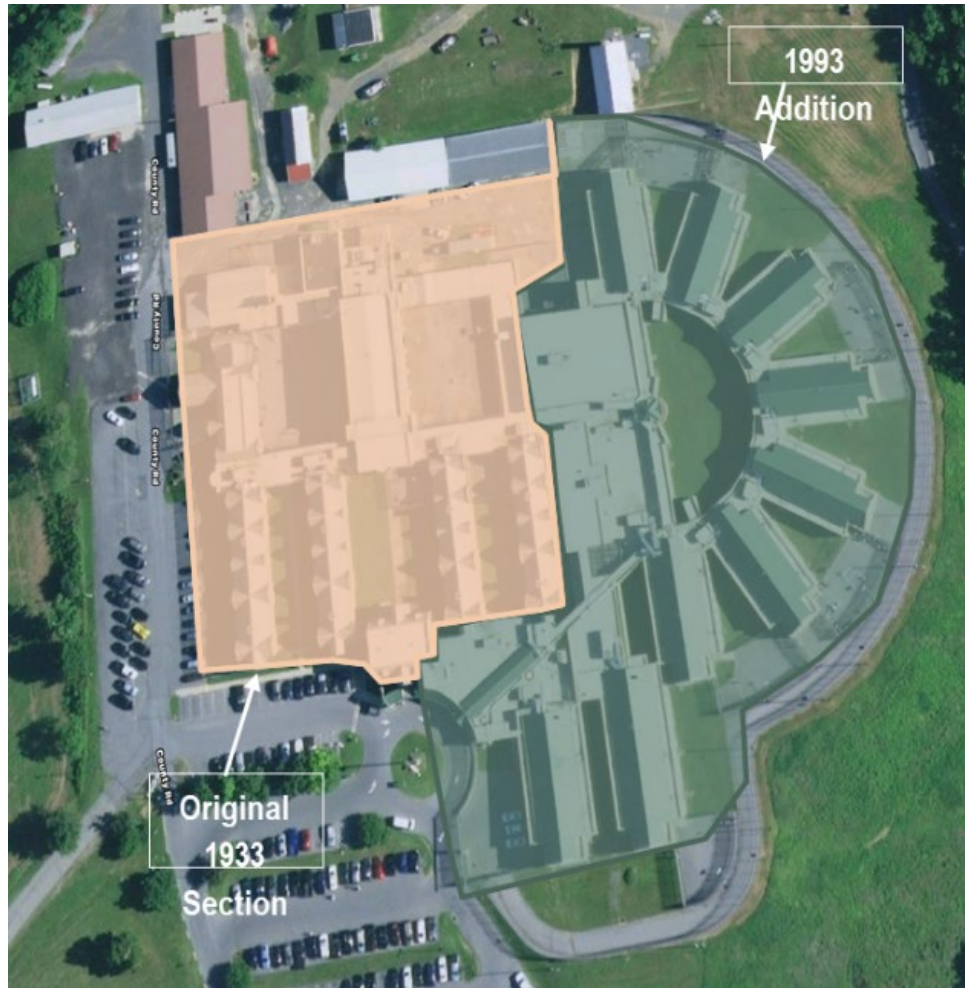
Technology Issues

- Improve technology infrastructure and communication within the facility
- Increase use of video beneficially for uses such as visitation and tele-health
- Reduce use of paper for operations, transition to electronic records

Operational Focus

- Adaptable to future system and operational changes
- Open-minded to new ways of operating a facility
- Impact of Existing Facility Condition on Operations

Participants were asked how the existing facility affects current operations, and the following is a summary of the responses:

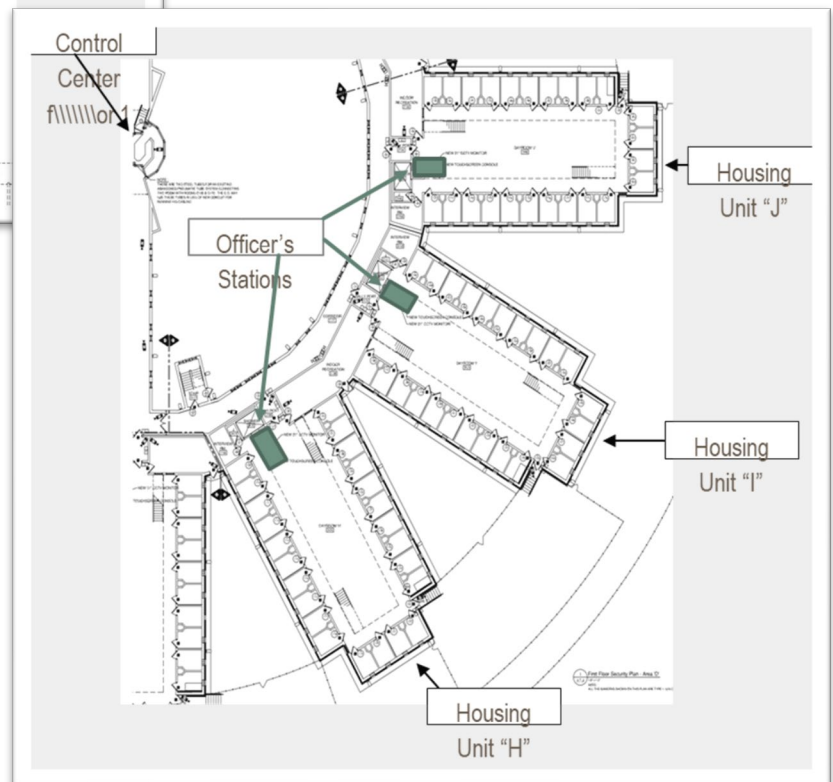
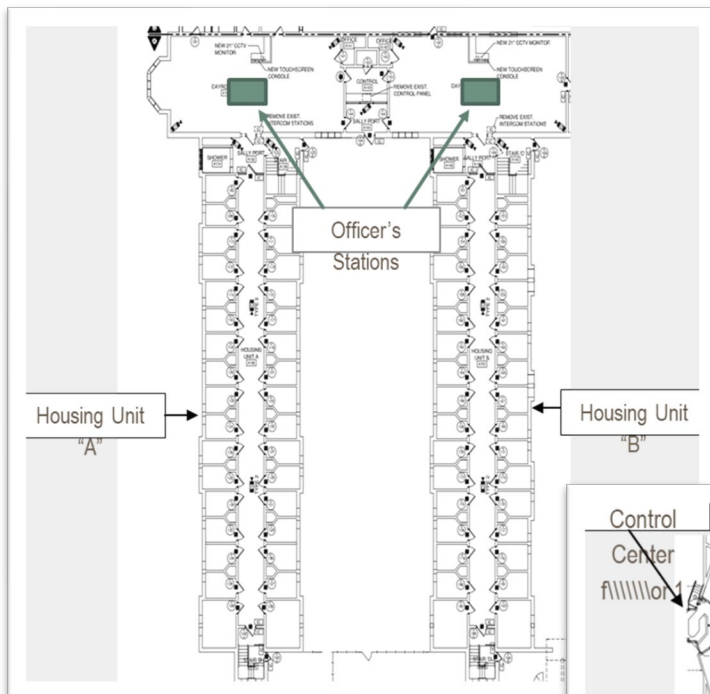


- Inefficient layouts lead to inefficient staffing deployment, not enough staff to fill all posts all of the time
- Large housing units with many persons and limited staffing results in limited 'out of cell' time for inmates, negative impact on inmate well-being
- Not possible to integrate male and females where necessary, completely separate facilities with separate staff currently required to accommodate both populations
- Single point of entry creates chaotic entrance activity with security concerns
- Difficult to manage mental health population with limited available and in conditions that are often counter to improving behavior and mental health of this population

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- Lack of space available for Probation, Parole, and other post-release agencies to begin working with persons in custody, challenge to ensure continuity of care and post-release services
- Limited opportunity and infrastructure to fully engage the Courts with video court
- Booking and release areas are undersized for needed separation of populations, security risks result from limited space
- Limited space for legal counsel and professional visitors to meet with clients
- Challenging work environment creates difficulties in staff recruitment and retention
- Lack of programming space and medical space impacts care of inmates



Precedents

The CGL Team lead a group discussion of key sea-change topics in the criminal justice industry under the topics of Jail Population and Programs, Operations, and Facility.

Jail Population and Programs

Changing Population – Characteristics

- Evolving justice system, who is left?
- Classification policy and procedure
- Mental health
- Men, women, youthful offenders
- Gender



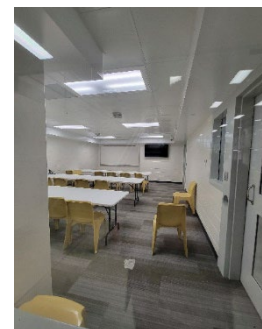
Mental Health Population

- Management and treatment approach
- Appropriate housing
- Staffing
- Continuum of care



Programs

- Keep inmates active
- Educational, vocational, recreational, spiritual
- Local in housing units – limit movement, easy inmate access
- Centralized – specialized program, efficient program delivery
- Outdoor recreation



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Services and Support

- Counseling, life skills, prep for release
- Food services, laundry, commissary
- Inmate workers
- Medical



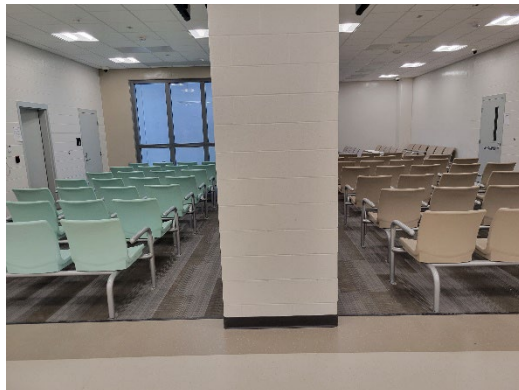
Visitation

- Contact visitation – professional, family and community
- Video visitation
- Important of maintaining connections



Intake/ Release

- Booking and intake location
- First contact, first impression, establish behavioral expectations
- Open seating, holding cells



Operations

Direct Supervision

- 9 key principles of direct supervision
- “Strategic Inmate Management”



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Limited Inmate Movement

- Reduce risk from inmate movement
- Staff operational efficiency
- Importance of housing unit design



Technology Applications

- Security systems, control room, video monitoring
- Door control, staff and inmate movement
- Computer pads for inmates
- Building systems control
- Video Court



Staff Support

- Staff wellness, impact on performance
- Training
- Recruitment and retention
- Staff screening



Facility

Normative Environment

- Environment queues behavior

Natural Light and Color

- Positive human environment

Connection to Nature

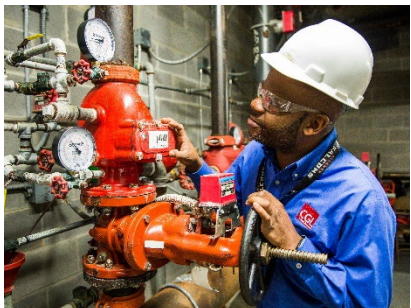
- Promote mindfulness and healing
- Incorporate nature into programming
- Biophilia: bring the outdoors inside

Maintenance and Sustainability

- Build for the future, prevent long-term costs
- Plan for flexibility
- Anticipate where maintenance staff needs to access

Image in Community/Good Neighbor

- Civic building, represents the County
- Statement to the community about mission
- Front door impacts experience from the start



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Operational Values

Participants were asked to write down separate values that they believe must be addressed in the facilities master plan, which they placed under the themes: Security, Inmate Management, Staff Support, Justice System, and Building Maintenance and Design.

Security

- Inmates and Staff (applies to both)
- Open Air Recreation
- Improved Perimeter Security



Inmate Management

- Classroom on Units
- Mental Health
- Normative Environment
- More Out of Cell Time



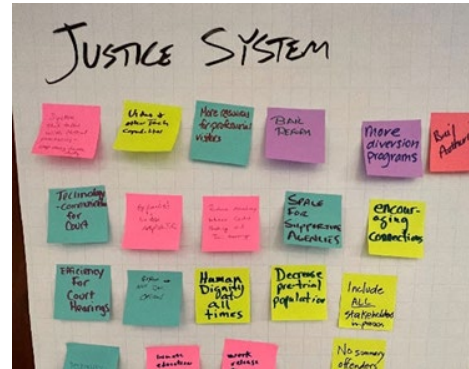
Staff Support

- Staff Courtyard (not near front entrance)
- Office Space for Attorneys
- Wellness/Fitness/Gym
- Relaxing Staff Break Areas
- Natural Light



Justice System

- More Diversion Programs
- More Resources for Professional Visits
- System Which Connects to Central Processing
- Inmate Education



Building Maintenance and Design

- Separate Staff/Visitor Entry/Exits
- Maintenance Staff Positions Only
- Enclosed Vehicle Sallyport
- Expandable and Contractable



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Trends

All participants divided into three groups themed as “Jail Population” and Program”, “Operations”, and “Facility”. Looking at the Operational Values from the previous exercise, each group was asked to discuss and record ideas and goals for the new facility, which as summarized as follows:

Jail Population and Program

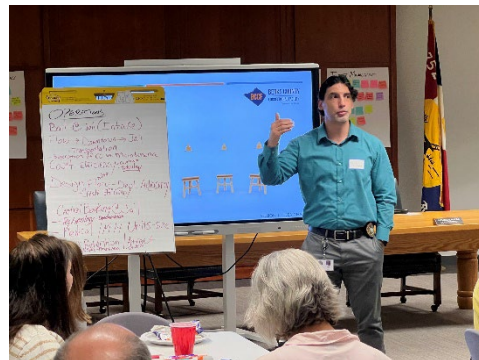
- Adequate and appropriate spaces for the jail populations
- Accessibility for eligible participants
- Housing Units dedicated to special populations
- Community partnerships
- Create opportunity for reentry programs
- Trauma Based Programming

Operations

- Bail at Intake
- Determine flow from Downtown to Jail to transportation
- Central Booking at Jail

Facility

- Align population classifications to locations based on system goals
- Short-term moves for long-term gains
- Gender-responsive and trauma-informed programs and services
- Incentive-based approach



Project Goals

Collectively, all stakeholders and participants developed a consensus list of Project Goals, which will continue to be a critical touch point for the County throughout the entire planning and design process for the new facility. Project Goals are identified as followed:

Provide a safe, supportive, and healing environment for inmates, staff, and visitors

Ensure appropriate and adequate space for inmate programming and recreation

Provide a normative environment where possible for inmates

Incorporate technology to advance operations and programming

Leverage the site location to enhance access and connection to nature

Exceed industry standards, plan for flexibility and future populations

Deliver a holistic approach to justice, connect with justice community

Incorporate clientele experience and feedback

Create a hub of services connect back to community at intake

Continue to work with stakeholders on justice system improvements

Evaluate total cost of ownership to make informed decision

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Session 2 – Berks County Vision

The following categories of facility components were discussed as a means for bridging stakeholder and user groups from the “Sea Change” topics in Session 1 to the preliminary space programming user meetings scheduled with jail operational representatives for the following week.

Inmate Services and Programs

- Services and Programs
- Physical Recreation
- Medical/ Mental/ Behavioral Health
- Volunteers/ Community Resource Center
- Intake



Visitors and Community

- Public Visitation
- Professional Visitation
- Community Space
- Civic Building



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Staff

- Staff Support Space
- Staff Entry
- Related and Support Agencies



Housing

- Housing Unit Types
- Beds Per Unit
- Inmate Management
- Housing Unit Features





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