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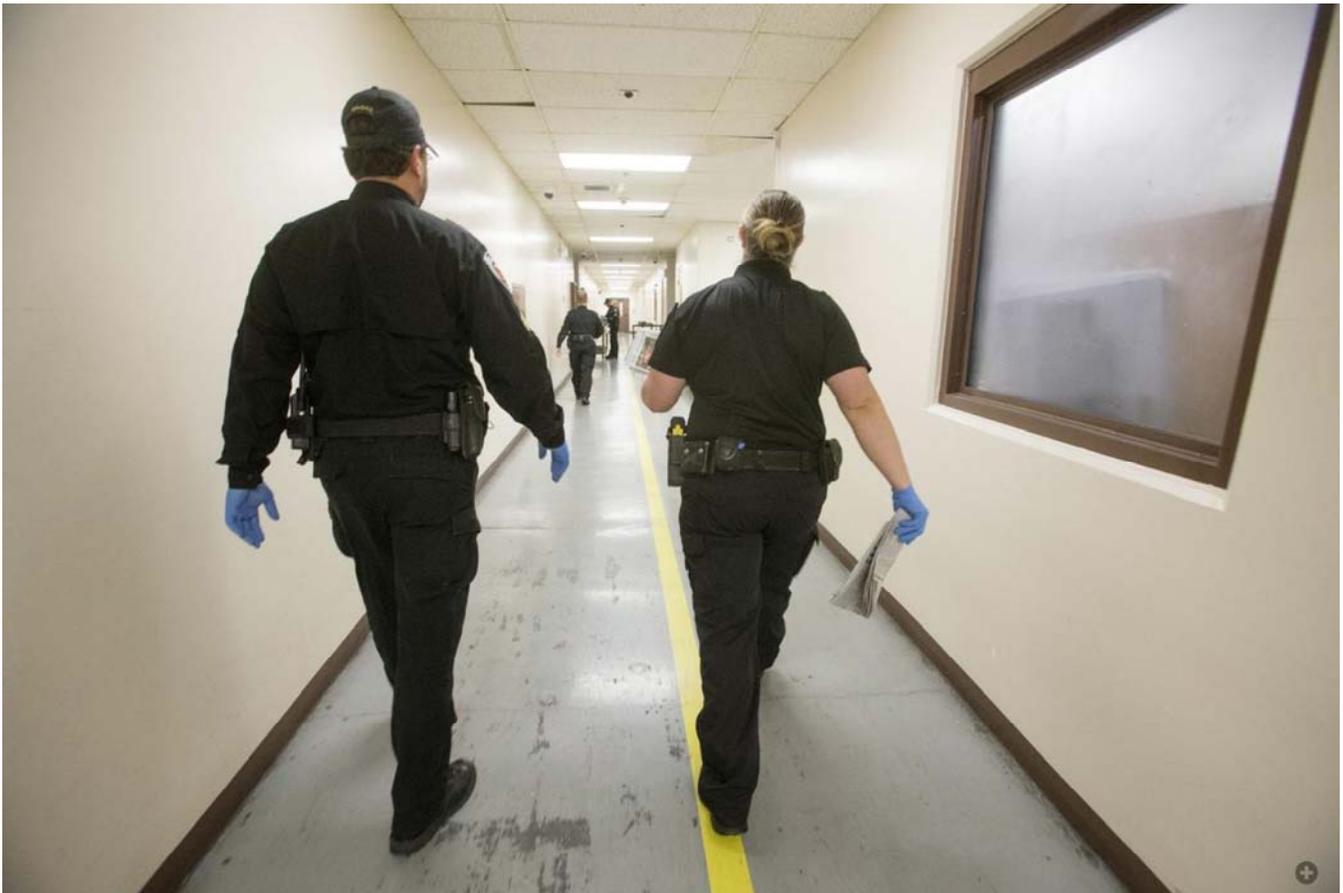
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Maintain not replace

By Tony Buhr

World staff writer Jun 19, 2019





WENATCHEE — The Chelan County Commission wants to look into the cost of maintaining the jail before it considers replacing it.

The commission wants to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars, Commissioner Kevin Overbay said. The jail was built in 1984 and the commission wants to investigate the possibility of refurbishing the 35-year-old building before it attempts to build a new one.

"I hear it once in a while, 'Have you taken a look at building a new jail?'" Overbay said. "No we haven't given it a lot of thought because we haven't been able to dissect exactly what the costs are going to be to bring everything to be to bring everything to the standard."



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On top of the cost, there is also the problem with where to build a new jail, he said. The current jail is connected to the Chelan County Courthouse and is a great location for the purpose it serves.

The county also needs to consider the needs of its inmate population, Overbay said. The jail is not meant to be a comfortable place.

“When you take a look at the facility itself, does it look like a Hilton?” he asked. “It does not.”

The design of the current jail provides a problem, Jail Director Bill Larson said. Most jail professionals will tell you it is a horrible design with long hallways that are difficult to see down and too many inmates crammed together in cells.

“If you go to Benton County as an example you can see the way that one is designed,” Larson said. “Where there is a raised platform and the way the cells are configured you’ve got staff that have eyes on.”

The wear and tear on the inside of the jail has only gotten worse over the years, due to the staffing shortage, Chief Deputy of Administration Chris Sharp said. In the past staff could manage work crews to paint and clean around the jail.

It’s also a bit of a cascading effect, Larson said. It’s like someone’s car. Once it starts getting damaged people just don’t treat it with the same respect anymore.

“You’ve got something nice and once someone starts defacing it and it gets dinged up and looks bad then just nobody cares, nobody takes care of it,” Larson said. “What our goal is to get it back up to a state where we can have some pride in its appearance and its state of maintenance.”

Tony Buhr

Environment, county and health reporter

Tony Buhr has been a professional reporter for almost seven years. He worked for the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin as a cops and courts reporter. The Ellensburg Daily Records as a cops and courts, breaking news, agriculture and water reporter.

