

# Madison County Board Approves Issuing Bonds to Cover Renovation of County Jail

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By a vote of 20 to 7 with one abstention, the Madison County Board voted to authorize issuing \$18 million of General Obligation Bonds to finance repairs and necessary modifications to the county jail.

Madison County Chairman Alan J. Dunstan stressed county officials are making repairs and necessary modifications to bring the jail up to current building codes, replacing aging infrastructure, and improving the efficient operation of the jail while ensuring the safety of the sheriff personnel who work at the jail, and the safety of the inmates. "There is nothing elaborate about the project other than meeting our basic responsibility to provide a safe and suitable facility as part of the criminal justice system," Dunstan said.

The funds generated by the issuing of bonds will include the installation of fire sprinkler and ventilation systems, replacement of deteriorated water and sewer lines, replacement of obsolete electrical and heating and cooling systems, the renovation of the kitchen and laundry facilities, an inmate booking and processing area, a new and enlarged sally port and other needed changes.

The Madison County jail was built in 1979 and was designed to hold approximately 100 inmates. The facility, which Illinois statutes require the county to operate, was expanded in 1983 and 1995. It now regularly houses between 275 and 300 inmates.

Following the county board's approval to issues bonds, County Administrator Joseph D. Parente said the county would move forward with the issuance of bonds over the next two months. "We believe an attractive interest rate environment still exists. In addition, the bonds will be federal tax exempt securities for purchasers, with an extra state tax exemption for Illinois residents who purchase the bonds," Parente said. "A portion of the bonds will be taxable Qualified Energy Conservation Bonds that have the benefit of a large portion of the interest being rebated from the federal government back to the county. Collectively, the bonds are designed to reduce the borrowing costs for the project and ultimately interest cost to the taxpayer."

Dunstan said that while board members understood the work on the jail was necessary, there was a lot of discussion about how to pay for the project. "The reasonable, fiscally prudent method to cover this project is what was approved by the board at today's meeting, taking advantage of the historically low interest rates and issuing bonds to be paid back over a period of 20 years," he said. According to Dunstan, the county has the benefit of the existing jail bonds being paid off next year. "This will free up the current jail bond tax levy for the new project. Combined with new construction being added to the tax rolls this year, and the proposal for the county to freeze its tax levy for 2014, it will help minimize the impact on taxpayers for the increased cost of the jail renovation project."

The county has identified an additional \$6.5 million in projects over the next two years, including a restoration project at the Madison County Courthouse. Dunstan said the county will pay for these projects out of reserves.

Dunstan explained that covering the cost of the jail repairs using the county's cash reserves would have depleted the funds which have been carefully managed and have contributed to the county's excellent credit rating. "It would have been irresponsible and would have prevented using approximately \$6.5 million of the cash reserves to pay for renovation projects needed at the courthouse and several other county facilities."

Among the projects necessary at the historic courthouse (dedicated in 1912), are the cleaning, tuck-pointing and sealing of the exterior and the replacement of the heating, cooling and ventilation systems. Other projects include the replacement of the roofs at the Administration Building and the Wood River facility, the cleaning and sealing of the exterior of the Administration Building, the replacement of five consoles for the Sheriff's Department's radio system, and several other planned projects.

Dunstan used the analogy of a homeowner maintaining their home in addressing the county's need to maintain its numerous facilities. "As any homeowner knows, as your home ages you continually have to make repairs and it's no different for Madison County. By making the repairs and spending some money on our facilities now, we can avoid having to spend a great deal of money later."

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