



# Revised Jail Renovations Project a big win for Madison County taxpayers

by Chris Slusser

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**NOTE: This is release on the Madison County Jail renovations vote provided by Madison County Republican Chairman Chris Slusser.**

**EDWARDSVILLE** – Today, the Madison County Board voted to approve the engineering work for the first phase of renovations for the Madison County Jail. The revised renovation project, at an estimated cost of \$9 million, will be done in two phases over the course of the next several years, each of which must be approved in the future by the Madison County Board.



The revised project is a far cry from the massive \$18.8 million project that Madison County Board Chairman Alan Dunstan attempted to put through in 2013, with the entire project to be financed through bonds, adding up to an additional \$7 million in finance costs. At the time, Dunstan insisted that the entire project was completely necessary and urgent and not a single penny could be used from the county's large reserves; all \$18.8 million had to be borrowed under his proposal.

Despite great public opposition, the County Board passed the measure via backdoor referendum, along a party line vote in October 2013. The move spurred an unprecedented grassroots movement by local taxpayers to collect the necessary 16,000-

plus signatures required to place the measure on the March 2014 ballot. The grassroots movement, led by the taxpayer watchdog group “Bonds on the Ballot”, achieved the unthinkable, collecting more than 23,000 signatures in less than three weeks, forcing the measure to the ballot. The measure was then overwhelmingly rejected by taxpayers 67 percent to 33 percent in the March 18, 2014 election.

Republicans on the County Board, along with grassroots groups who opposed the \$18.8 million project continually acknowledged that there were some needed renovations to the jail, and that a more reasonable, scaled back version that didn’t involve borrowing would be the most responsible approach. After more than a year of negotiating, a more reasonable approach is finally being agreed upon between county leaders.

“This is a victory for the taxpayers of Madison County. Instead of being forced to accept Alan Dunstan’s original ‘Cadillac version’ of the so called ‘renovation’ project that involved all sorts of unnecessary bells, whistles and a massive amount of debt, the County Board is now taking a much more reasonable approach to making the needed repairs to the jail’s infrastructure that involves no borrowing,” said Madison County Republican Chairman Chris Slusser.

“When Republicans on the County Board asked questions and proposed alternatives two years ago, we were consistently dismissed by Chairman Dunstan. The taxpayers sent a clear message at the ballot box in March of 2014, and now we know that all of the ‘urgencies’ and scare tactics that Dunstan was employing to ram through the project weren’t necessarily the case,” said County Board Member Lisa Ciampoli (R-Collinsville). “Finally, after intense scrutiny by taxpayers and Republicans on the County Board, we’ve uncovered the truth: the necessary repairs will cost less than half of what Dunstan originally proposed, and no borrowing is necessary. If both phases are eventually approved as they’re currently being proposed, the taxpayers will have saved more than \$16 million over the original bloated project.”

“I am very happy that the project has been greatly scaled back”, said Madison County Board Member Mick Madison (R-Bethalto). “The officers working in the jail deserve to work in a decent, safe environment, so I am happy that the project is ultimately moving forward. This is also a giant victory for county taxpayers, and I am very impressed with the Bonds on Ballot group for standing up when they didn’t feel their government was listening to them. My congratulations to them.”

Slusser also credits the tens of thousands of taxpayers in Madison County who stood up and weathered the fight to uncover the true needed costs of the project. “This is a shining example of why taxpayers must be vigilant and hold their elected officials accountable. It’s not often that taxpayers can score this type of victory over wasteful spending by local government, but this is proof that it is possible.”

Madison said he would like to see the State of Illinois repeal the back-door referendum method, so these issues would automatically go on the ballot for a vote by the taxpayers, like in neighboring Missouri.

The Bonds on the Ballot group has vowed to continue to keep a close eye on the project to ensure that there are no cost overruns, or unnecessary additions without taxpayer input and approval.