

## **Sheriff says jail must be expanded**

By Ian Berry Staff Writer

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** To hear an audio recording of Wednesday's Hamilton County commissioners meeting, go to [www.tfponline.com](http://www.tfponline.com). Hamilton County Sheriff Billy Long, who is working on how to reduce overcrowding and get the county jail recertified, said Wednesday that more bed space is needed. "We need to look at updating our jail," Sheriff Long said.

He said that could mean adding a wing, a building atop the jail or "whatever the experts show us we can do."

Sheriff Long made the comments at a Hamilton County Commission Security and Corrections committee meeting attended by several commissioners and Public Defender Ardena Garth.

He and others discussed the dilapidated state of the current jail and the prospect of adding space at the Silverdale Workhouse.

Commission Chairman Larry Henry said he didn't "see the sentiment out there" for new jail construction now. But he said a private study that the county commissioned for more than \$100,000 in 2003 said new construction would be needed in 2010.

"We need to get our eggs in a basket and start planning for it," Mr. Henry said.

Scott Schoolfield, the county's administrator of human services, said the county has asked for an estimate from Corrections Corporation of America, which operates Silverdale, about new construction. A 128-bed expansion to the facility alleviated jail overcrowding temporarily in 2004, but officials reported more overcrowding by the end of the year.

On Tuesday, a CCA official said the cost of concrete is "astronomically high," according to Mr. Schoolfield.

"She said you're going to be surprised with what you paid for the last 128 beds, compared to what you'll pay for the next 128 beds," Mr. Schoolfield said.

Jeannine Alday, chief of staff in the county mayor's office, said that while building at Silverdale would be less expensive than other jail construction, the savings would be minimized by the fact that medical and dining facilities are "maxed out."

Another topic at the meeting was conditions at the current jail. Among the issues, according to Sheriff Long and Chief Jim Hart, who oversees the county jail: The jail has lost three corrections officers since Sept. 1 and is short-staffed by 19 people. Elevators, locks and a kitchen floor have been in a state of disrepair.

Overcrowded conditions are placing extra stress on both corrections officers and inmates, according to Mr. Hart.

The state pays the county \$35 per day to house its inmates, \$24 less than the total cost.

Sheriff Long said the state does cover the full cost of housing inmates in Davidson and Shelby counties. He said he is working with State Rep. JoAnne Favors, D-Chattanooga, and other legislators to address the issue in Nashville during the next legislative session.

"We're asking them to pay full price," Sheriff Long said. "But that's going to take a while." The meeting was convened by Commissioner Greg Beck, chairman of the Security and Corrections Committee.

E-mail Ian Berry at [iberry@timesfreepress.com](mailto:iberry@timesfreepress.com)



Billy Long

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