

Government Services Committee
Senator Ronald Sorvaag, Chairman

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Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

Missouri River Correctional Center (MRCC) Land Use and Planning Study

- Presented to Budget Section – June 25, 2014
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- 2013 Senate Bill No. 2015
 - Develop options for the feasibility and desirability of relocating the MRCC to a site adjacent to the Youth Correctional Center (YCC) in Mandan
 - Potential operational efficiencies
 - Cost estimates
 - Review options to develop all or a portion of MRCC site into a public day park
 - Continue agricultural activities on MRCC site
 - MRCC land not to be used for residential, commercial or industrial purposes
- Study Results
 - Feasible but not desirable to locate MRCC to a site adjacent to YCC.
 - Significant risk associated with maintaining strict physical separation of two distinct populations located in close proximity to each other. (MRCC – adult male; YCC – juvenile male and female)
 - Few, if any, opportunities to share services that would result in operational efficiencies or operational cost savings.
 - Estimated project cost - \$28.2 million to \$28.4 million
 - Existing MRCC land is well suited for a public day park
 - Three potential concepts identified
 - Two concepts require relocation of MRCC
 - One concept allows MRCC to continue operation on current site
 - Estimated project cost - \$7.1 million to \$11.9 million

Executive Summary

Study Objectives: The Missouri River Correctional Center (MRCC) Land Use and Planning Study is comprised of a study to develop options for the feasibility and desirability of relocating the MRCC to a site adjacent to the Youth Correctional Center (YCC) in Mandan, and a land use study to review options to develop all or a portion of the current MRCC site into a public day park. The purpose of the study is to explore the possibility of consolidating the MRCC and YCC facilities and whether consolidation would save the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCR) operational costs. Additionally, it asks if the MRCC should be moved due to recent flooding issues, and if the site would be better suited as a public day park.

Study Conclusions: The study finds that while it may be physically feasible to relocate the MRCC to a site adjacent to the YCC and maintain adequate sight and sound separation, it is not desirable due to the significant risk associated with maintaining strict physical separation of two distinct populations located in close proximity to each other. One incident, however unlikely, between an adult offender and an at-risk youth, would prove to be too costly to the DOCR and the State of North Dakota. Further, the study finds that there are few, if any, opportunities to share services that would result in operational efficiencies or operational cost savings that might offset the risk.

The study also finds that the existing MRCC land is well suited for a public day park, and that there are opportunities for both full utilization of the site and partial utilization that would allow MRCC to occupy a portion of the site.

MRCC Background Information: The MRCC site consists of approximately 900 acres of land in southwest Bismarck along the Missouri River comprised of heavy wooded land, pastures, irrigated agricultural land, delineated wetlands, and a floodway. While the site compound is not technically within the flood plain, it has been prone to flooding in recent years causing damage to many of its buildings.

The Mission of the MRCC is to provide a safe and healthy environment for minimum security inmates to apply themselves to the task of rehabilitation. MRCC currently houses up to 151 inmates who have three years or less left on their sentence, have been carefully screened and classified as minimum custody, and are preparing for release. A portion of the MRCC population includes both violent offenders and sex offenders that meet the criteria for minimum custody. MRCC is the only option for transition housing for this portion of the population. While there is no fence around the property, the MRCC provides a safe and secure environment by maintaining proper custody, work, education, and treatment programs, encouraging inmates to make the needed change to be law abiding citizens and productive members of society. Rough Rider Industries (RRI) runs a welding shop, sheep pasture, and sandbagging operation at MRCC, providing jobs for inmates and revenue for the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCR).

Due to the age of its buildings, maintenance concerns, flood damage, and recent maintenance issues, including mold, considerable upgrades are required to keep the existing MRCC operational.

YCC Background Information: The YCC sits on approximately 225 acres of land that is a portion of 1,600 acres of State owned land located west of Mandan along the Heart River. The land consists of heavy wooded land, pastures, and a sand and gravel pit.

The mission of the YCC is to provide professional, team-oriented juvenile correctional services to troubled adolescents within a safe and secure environment. It has the ability to house up to 90 juveniles, both male and female ages 12-20. Although the YCC is a correctional facility, it has a school-like feel, providing educational and treatment opportunities within multiple buildings located in a campus-like setting. In order to maintain the campus feel and rehabilitative culture of the YCC, there is no fence around the property.



MRCC Relocation Study

MRCC Relocation Study: The results of the study show that it is physically feasible to locate the MRCC to a site adjacent to the YCC and maintain a reasonable level of sight and sound separation. The YCC site offers two potential settings for the MRCC; the lower plateau site directly west of the YCC, and the upper bluff site that sits on top of the ridgeline to the southwest of the YCC. The sites offer varying degrees of physical separation and both provide opportunities to face away from the YCC to promote sight and sound separation. Yet the close proximity of both sites to YCC result in concerns about maintaining strict physical separation between the MRCC and YCC populations. Both facilities would require physical and operational changes, as well as heavy reliance on staff, to maintain this separation.

The study also found that there are very few facilities, if any, that could reasonably be shared given the distinct differences of the programs. There may be some minimal sharing of staff beyond that which already occurs, particularly in maintenance and medical staff, but sharing of facilities or educational, treatment, or security staff does not appear to be feasible. In fact, the study found that additional security measures may be required to ensure complete separation between the adults and juveniles. Vocational opportunities for both adults and juveniles would likely decrease, and transportation costs for MRCC inmates would rise due to the increase in distance and time between YCC and NDSP.

Project costs for a new MRCC facility on the YCC site are estimated to be nearly identical at \$28,372,000 for the lower plateau site and \$28,172,000 for the bluff site.

While physically feasible, the study found that it is not desirable for the State of North Dakota to relocate the MRCC to a site adjacent to the YCC when factoring in the risk associated with locating adult male inmates in close physical proximity to both male and female juvenile offenders. One incident between an adult male and an at-risk juvenile would result in intense public scrutiny of the State's decision to place two populations that absolutely must be separated immediately adjacent to each other. The State must carefully weigh the risk and liability associated with this "worst-case" scenario against the ability to maintain strict physical, sight, and sound separation, not only in the near future, but over the life of both the MRCC and the YCC.

MRCC Land Use Study: Three potential park concepts were developed to study the possibility of reallocating the MRCC site to a public day park. Each includes a primary park building for visitors, a paved road network to access the various parts of the park, a hierarchy network of trails providing visitors with options to walk, run, bike, hike and cross-country ski in the winter, a recreational waterway offering backwater conditions ideal for canoeing, kayaking and beachfront swimming. Each option also maintains nearly all the irrigated agricultural land providing continued revenue to the DOCR. Concepts A & B would require the MRCC to be relocated, while Concept C could allow the MRCC to remain in operation on the northern portion of the site and the southern portion to be used for a public day park with the leased agricultural land acting as a natural buffer between the two.

Public opinion, based on public input meetings and correspondence received from local citizens, is vastly in favor of using all or a portion of the MRCC site for a public day park.

Project costs to develop a public day park range from \$7,110,000 for a 200 acre partial part to \$11,897,000 for a full 600 acre park, including additional land owned by the State at the northwest corner of the site.



Park Concept A



Park Concept B



Park Concept C