



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES SHERIFF CIVILIAN OVERSIGHT COMMISSION

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May 15, 2018

To: Each Commissioner

From: Brian K. Williams, Executive Director
Daniel Delgadillo, Senior Staff Analyst

Mira Loma Women's Detention Center Project Update

At a recent meeting of the Civilian Oversight Commission (COC), several members of the COC requested an update on the status of the Mira Loma Detention Center Project. This memorandum provides a brief update on the status of the project. Should the members of the COC require additional information, staff from the Department of Public Works is available to provide a briefing to the full COC at our June 2018 meeting or thereafter.

Mira Loma Project Objective

On October 22, 2013, the Board of Supervisors (Board), authorized the transfer of the Pitchess Detention Center (PDC) site for a proposed women's facility, funded under Assembly Bill (AB) 900 grant, to the Mira Loma Women's Detention Center (MLWDC)¹. The existing Mira Loma Facility will be renovated and expanded to create a facility setting that will house 1,604 medium to low security inmates.

Project Overview

The Project site is located in the City of Lancaster in the Antelope Valley of northern Los Angeles County, which is approximately 70 miles north of downtown Los Angeles and immediately north of the City of Palmdale. The Project will occupy a 46-acre portion of the existing MLWDC property and facilities, which is currently not occupied by inmates or serving any detention functions.

The MLWDC has been in operation as a detention center since 1945, when the California Youth Authority began to run a vocational school at the site, which focused on

¹ On March 2012, the County was conditionally awarded \$100 million in AB 900 funds to develop a female detention facility at Pitchess Detention Center. Mira Loma became available as an alternative site for the AB 900 funded female detention facility at Pitchess following Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Bureau's termination of its contract with the Sheriff at Mira Loma.

job training for juvenile offenders. In the mid-1950s, the MLWDC operated as a medium-security facility until it ceased operations in 1979. It reopened in 1983 and was expanded with the construction of several new buildings in 1976. The facility was repurposed for female inmates and was known as the Mira Loma Female Honor Ranch, but was closed again in 1993. The MLWDC reopened for use in 1997 by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to house undocumented immigrants until their immigration cases were decided, and it operated in that capacity until 2012. The site has not housed inmates since that time. The MLWDC Project involves the reuse, renovation, and expansion of the majority of the currently unoccupied MLWDC property. Some buildings will be demolished to accommodate the new site plan, which includes new buildings and facility construction. The majority of the buildings will be renovated and/or expanded, making use of the majority of the existing buildings and infrastructure on the Project site.

According to the Los Angeles County Jail Plan Independent Review and Comprehensive Report, the MLWDC is planned and programmed to best meet the rehabilitative needs of low and medium security risk incarcerated women in Los Angeles County. MLWDC is envisioned as a campus-style detention facility where female inmates will participate in a combination of education, vocational training, inmate worker programs, substance abuse therapy, mental health counseling, and self-help programs. The campus is intended as a relatively low-security facility with a lot of inmate movement between housing, programs, dining, and recreation. Overall security and community will be maintained by an actively monitored and robust secure perimeter fence. Women requiring a higher security facility, intensive mental health treatment or specific medical care beyond that offered at MLWDC will be housed in other jail facilities in the County.

The report further explains the ability to house most of the female inmate population at MLWDC is also an important component to helping resolve other issues within the overall jail system. MLWDC will allow the use of the Century Regional Detention Facility, where women are currently housed, by other populations within the jail system².

Project Background

On March 12, the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) conditionally awarded \$100 million in AB 900 Grant funds to the County to develop a 1,156-bed female detention facility at Pitchess Detention Center in Castaic.

² <http://bos.lacounty.gov/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=tuRkJrGh9i4%3d&portalid=1>

On November 14, 2013, the BSCC approved the County's request to relocate the proposed 1,156-bed female detention facility from Pitchess Detention Center to the existing detention facility at Mira Loma in Lancaster. On January 16, 2014, the BSCC approved the revised project scope, budget, and schedule, which included the addition of 448 transitional housing beds to yield a higher total bed capacity of 1,604 beds.

The County has since been working to meet the milestone requirements for the AB 900 Grant funding program, which includes the development of the program, scoping documents, a conceptual site plan, a project cost estimate, and a schedule. On August 17, 2015, the State approved the County's submission to establish the project under AB 900 guidelines, effectively enabling projects costs to be eligible for future reimbursement.

Projected dates of completion and operation:

The project is currently in the procurement process to solicit design-build proposals from qualified firms to design and construct the project. According to the Department of Public Works, the current estimated cost range for the total project is between \$136 and \$146 million. The project is anticipated to be completed by 2021 and begin operations in 2022.

Community Concerns:

On September 2016, the project Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was completed in accordance with all California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requirements and with extended public review opportunities. A total of 295 comment letters containing multiple comments were received and responded to in the final EIR, in addition to policy related concerns regarding Valley Fever and the distance from downtown Los Angeles for visiting families.

Valley Fever

Valley Fever is a typically treatable, non-contagious illness that usually affects the lungs and is caused by a fungus known as *Coccidioides* found in the soil in many parts of California and elsewhere.

The fungus grows in soils in areas of low rainfall, high summer temperatures and moderate winter temperatures, such as the southwestern United States and northern Mexico³, specifically:

³ <https://vfce.arizona.edu/valley-fever-people/about-valley-fever>

- San Joaquin and central valleys of California
- Southern Arizona (especially in Phoenix and Tucson)
- Southern Nevada, New Mexico and western Texas (especially El Paso)
- East-central Utah and south-eastern Washington (recently found)
- Sonora and Chihuahua, Mexico

People most at risk are those working among dust and soil disturbing activities such as excavation, archeology, firefighters, mining and agricultural fields. According to the Department of Public Works, the risk of Valley Fever is expected to be no greater than in other Lancaster portions of the Antelope Valley. The Sheriff and Department of Public Health will continue to assess medical conditions that may be related to Valley Fever.

Distance from families and inmates:

The primary disadvantage to housing the majority of the female inmate population at MWLDC is its relative remoteness from the major population centers in the County. There are opportunities to mitigate the distance through the use of video visitation, video hearings and increased transportation for visiting families, but the distance will always be a factor. The County is also aware of the potential challenges the increased distance may pose for visiting family members in the downtown Los Angeles area, while for other families living in the Lancaster area, the project will be closer. Strategies to reduce negative impacts of operating the MLWDC away from the downtown Los Angeles area will be evaluated by providing contract transportation for visitors and video visiting, and reviewing national best practices for visiting and family reunification.

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