



Walton County Democratic Party  
P.O Box 526  
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Ray Padgett, Chairman

**Do you support or oppose the decision by the Walton County Commission to construct a new jail facility at its current site, behind the Walton County Courthouse in DeFuniak Springs, and why?**

The decision to construct the new jail on top of and around the existing jail in DeFuniak Springs is a major mistake by our County Commissioners. Many Walton County citizens have identified and voiced clear and valid reasons to take this opportunity to relocate our county jail. We believe there are few reasons to construct the jail on the existing site.

Construction of the jail on the existing site negatively impacts our community and county by increasing street and parking congestion for the courthouse, county offices and adjacent businesses; increasing security risks during and after construction; increasing the financial cost of the facility; and by reducing the attractiveness of one of Florida's most Historic Communities. The commissioners have also failed to see, understand and account for the immediate and ongoing impact of the explosion in Walton County's growth. The jail will need to be expanded many times in the near future.

Congestion and inadequate parking around the current jail is a frustrating problem for visitors to the jail, courthouse, county offices, and adjacent businesses. This problem becomes critical when emergency medical treatment is needed or if emergency evacuation is ever needed. According to the National Transportation Safety Board, over 95% of all train derailments occur within city limits. A derailment of hazardous material in DeFuniak Springs may mean an evacuation of all prisoners.

Anyone who has been involved in a major home renovation (while the family lives there) understands the financial implications and increased safety concerns of renovation versus building new. Some obvious items in this \$14 million contract are the expenditure of over \$500,000 for demolition, site work and kitchen shutdown. Safety of construction workers is planned and insured by the construction company and monitored by our government; however, major construction around an active office and jailed prisoners exponentially increases the safety risk associated with this project. The risk of personal injury and the risk of prisoner escape are both dramatically increased.

No one wants a jail built in their neighborhood, especially if it is located next door or just a few blocks away. This emotion runs deeper if your neighborhood is one of the premier

historic communities in the state; and the citizens are working diligently to maintain and improve its historic image. Many people visit and many others are moving to DeFuniak Springs because it is a quiet, beautiful and historic community. Adding 1,200 prison beds to downtown is contrary to the efforts of citizens to improve the historic image of DeFuniak Springs.

If Walton County continues its dramatic growth rate; our county jail will be overrun in a few years, maybe by the time it is finished. Constant expansion demands room to grow. The current jail site is already overcrowded. Many good sites are available; one possibility is a 77 acre site located directly across State Highway 83 from the state prison and owned by the city of DeFuniak Springs.

The Walton County Democratic Party believes that the new jail should be built at a site other than the current jail. The existing jail facility could be used as a 'next day holding' facility for prisoner court cases and the offices could be converted to badly needed office space for other county government offices. The citizens of Walton County should not allow a mistake of this magnitude by its elected officials. It is our understanding that the vote to build on the current site is very close. We recommend that you contact your county commissioner and ask them to vote to build the new jail at another site.