

Bexar County Adult Detention Center Readies for Construction

By Torrey Sims

SAN ANTONIO — Back in 2015, the Bexar County Commissioners Court in San Antonio approved \$32 million for the city to use for a jail modernization project. Now, by January 2017, the first phase will come to fruition. Houston-based, design-build firm Butler-Cohen LLC received approval in November 2016 for the \$2.9 million contract, which will consist of Phase I of the modernization. As construction creeps to a start, the first portion of the project will include the construction of eight dormitories with tiered housing, ample daylight and convenient access to classrooms and program areas — all within the four-story South Unit complex, said Facilities Management Director Dan Curry, who is overseeing the project, in a statement.

Part of the Bexar County Adult Detention Center, the South Unit tower will add a total of 512 program-focused beds upon completion. Bexar County's former jail is located on the banks of San Pedro Creek in downtown San Antonio, and currently houses federal inmates managed by private-prison company the GEO Group, based in Boca Raton, Fla. As part of the redevelopment of San Pedro Creek, the former jail will be closed and the inmates transferred to Bexar County

Jail's main complex, necessitating the addition of the new beds at the complex, according to Eric Cohen, owner/principal at Butler-Cohen. Bexar County issued an RFQ/RFP to design and construct a new tower to house lower-custody county inmates displaced by the federal inmates, according to Cohen.

"This is an exciting project for all of us at the Bexar County Sheriff's Office," said Bexar County Sheriff Susan Pamerleau. "By relocating several sheriff's administrative functions and renovating existing space, operations will be streamlined and modernized."

Bexar County has initially approved \$2.9 million to fund design, mobilization and demolition of existing structures. The final guaranteed maximum price (GMP) will be confirmed after design is completed, but is expected to be in the \$30 million range, according to Cohen. The new tower may also contain the central magistrate functions for Bexar County, the city of San Antonio and other surrounding cities. As of press time, the demolition of existing structures is expected to begin in December, and construction on the new tower will start in January 2017 and will take approximately 12 months, according to Cohen.

"Unlike conventional county lock ups, this new addition to the Bexar



The new Bexar County Adult Detention Center in San Antonio will include 512 program-focused beds in order to prepare inmates for life after release.

County jail system will contain large dormitories and will have plenty of space for programming in an effort to allow the inmates to return to the community as productive citizens. This configuration is part of Bexar County's efforts to stop the revolving door of inmates through its system," said Cohen.

The notion of creating program space within correctional facilities has been increasingly popular over the last few years in order to reduce recidivism and lessen the national jail and prison population. Sheriff Pamerleau said in a statement that she supported the new design and added: "This type of facility specifically focuses on programs to assist

individuals to return to the community as productive citizens. The planning for the programming and the focus on mental health as well is critical to its success, not just the building itself."

Sheriff Pamerleau explained that since the vast majority of those incarcerated in the Bexar County Adult Detention Center will be returning to the community, it makes sense to provide effective jail programs that will help reduce recidivism, and "building a 512-bed program-focused housing unit for inmates will make a big difference."

A precast method was chosen for the project due to restrictive construction areas and schedule constraints for the 100,000-square-foot, five-story tower construction, according to Cohen.

Locally based Munoz & Company is the architect of record on the project, while Butler-Cohen's design-build team includes: Gahanna, Ohio-based GGC Engineering; Dallas-based Architect Deborah L. Williams, who is assisting with compliance with the Texas Commission on Jail Standards; San Antonio-based Argyle Group; and Spartansburg, S.C.-based Tindall Corporation, who is completing the precast portion of the project. Locally based DRG Architects is serving as the program manager for Bexar County on the project.

Buddy Johns, president of Argyle Security, the SEC and DEC on the project, explained the importance of the project and how it will significantly increase security and improve safety for Bexar County. "The [Bexar County] project is going to help support community efforts when it comes to reducing recidivism," said Johns. "We are thrilled to be part of this important project, especially in our hometown of San Antonio."

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