

Latah County Jail Stakeholder Summary



PREPARED FOR LATAH COUNTY
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Executive Summary

In February 2026, Clearwater Financial conducted five stakeholder interviews as part of a broader public engagement and planning effort led by Latah County to evaluate the current jail situation and determine a responsible long-term path forward. Latah County Sheriff's Office provided the names of nine stakeholders and, using an email draft by Clearwater, reached out to each individual requesting they schedule an interview with Clearwater Financial. After initial outreach and follow up, five stakeholders participated in the interviews. Clearwater Financial also reached out to a tenth stakeholder, but they were unresponsive.

Participants represented a range of perspectives connected to the local justice system, public safety, community leadership, courts, probation, treatment services, and legal processes. Interviewers encouraged stakeholders to share their honest feedback with the knowledge that all stakeholder feedback would be summarized and generalized to keep the feedback anonymous.

The stakeholder interviews were intended to help the County better understand how the closure is affecting local systems and what considerations may inform future decisions. Questions were focused on stakeholder awareness, perceptions of the current jail facility, impacts of closing the jail for overnight housing, operational and community consequences, future facility options, funding considerations, public trust, and communication needs.

Across conversations, stakeholders generally agreed that the jail issue is no longer simply a building-maintenance problem. Rather, it has become a broader public safety, justice system, financial, and community planning issue. Stakeholders described the current arrangement as disruptive, costly, and difficult to sustain over time. While participants varied in their familiarity with the full physical condition of the jail, there was broad agreement that Latah County needs a safe, compliant, and functional detention solution that protects staff, inmates, visitors, attorneys, service providers, and the broader public.

Stakeholders also consistently emphasized that the public may not yet fully understand the issue. Several noted that residents may confuse the County Jail with the newer Moscow Police Department facility, may not understand the difference between City and County law enforcement functions, or may not see how a jail affects residents who never expect to interact with the justice system. This feedback suggests that public understanding, project clarity, and basic education about the County's responsibilities will be important considerations as the planning process continues.

Existing Facility Conditions and Safety Concerns

A major theme across the interviews was that the existing jail is widely viewed as outdated and functionally limited. Stakeholders described the facility as old, constrained, and poorly suited for modern detention operations. Specific concerns included the age of the building, plumbing and electrical limitations, fire and life-safety issues, limited space, and the difficulty of safely separating inmates with different risks or needs. Several stakeholders also raised concerns about the lack of appropriate spaces for attorney-client meetings, assessments, medical or treatment-related interactions, and other functions that are now expected in a modern correctional setting.

Most stakeholders did not merely describe the situation as the jail being uncomfortable or unappealing. Instead, the concern was that the building's age and layout create operational risks. The current facility

was described as limiting the ability of staff to manage inmates safely, protect visitors and service providers, maintain separation when needed, and provide secure spaces for required professional interactions. Even stakeholders who had not toured the full facility emphasized that safety, ADA compliance, and constitutional compliance are basic expectations for a County detention facility.

Impacts of Overnight Housing Closure

The closure of the jail for overnight housing was one of the most significant topics raised in the interviews. Stakeholders repeatedly described the current practice of transporting inmates to Nez Perce County as burdensome for law enforcement (both Latah County and municipal officers), courts, attorneys, probation, treatment-related services, families, and inmates returning to the community.

Transportation was the most common concern. Stakeholders noted that moving individuals to and from another county takes officers away from local coverage, adds overtime or staffing pressure, increases costs, and can affect response capacity. This was viewed as especially concerning for agencies that are already managing staffing shortages or minimum staffing levels. The issue was not described as a temporary inconvenience, but as an operational strain that could worsen over time if the County continues to rely on out-of-county housing.

Stakeholders also described practical consequences for people moving through the justice system. Individuals released from custody in another county may lack transportation back to Moscow or other parts of Latah County. Some may not and case management.

Together, these comments suggest that the closure affects more than jail operations. It has created ripple effects throughout the local justice system, including law enforcement staffing, court coordination, probation supervision, attorney access, family access, and release planning.

Need for a Long-Term Solution

Most stakeholders expressed support for Latah County maintaining a local jail facility rather than relying indefinitely on another county. The primary reasons were local control, operational efficiency, proximity to courts and services, law enforcement capacity, and long-term cost predictability. Stakeholders raised concerns that another county's jail capacity, fees, procedures, staffing, or priorities could change over time, leaving Latah County with limited control over a core public safety function.

Several stakeholders acknowledged that a regional jail or continued contract housing may appear attractive from a cost-sharing perspective, but they questioned whether those options would actually solve the operational problems now being experienced. If a regional facility is not close to Moscow and the County Courts, law enforcement, attorneys, probation, and service providers, many of the current transportation and access challenges would remain. This feedback suggests that proximity and local control are important factors for stakeholders when evaluating long-term alternatives.

Renovation Versus New Construction

Stakeholders were generally skeptical of renovating the existing jail as a long-term solution. The courthouse-basement location was viewed as physically constrained, difficult to expand, and unlikely to support modern detention standards without significant cost and disruption. Several stakeholders

suggested that even an expensive renovation may only extend the life of the facility temporarily, without solving larger issues related to space, separation, safety, access, and future growth.

The strongest preference expressed across interviews was for the County to evaluate a new facility. Some stakeholders supported a jail-only project focused tightly on the most urgent need, while others identified potential benefits in a combined jail and Sheriff's Office facility. However, stakeholders cautioned that a larger project could become harder to explain and more difficult to fund. This suggests that project scope, cost, and public understanding are closely connected issues in the planning process.

Location and Access Considerations

Location emerged as an important consideration. Stakeholders generally preferred that a future jail remain in or near Moscow because Moscow is the county seat, and because proximity to courts, probation, attorneys, law enforcement, and related services matters. A location too far from these functions could have some of the same transportation and coordination problems as sending inmates to a different County.

At the same time, stakeholders recognized that the current courthouse site may not provide enough space for a modern facility. Stakeholders suggested that a future site would need adequate acreage for security, parking, circulation, utilities, staff functions, and future expansion. Stakeholder feedback indicates that location will likely be evaluated not only in terms of land availability, but also in terms of access, operational efficiency, neighborhood context, utilities, and relationship to existing justice system functions.

Planning for Future Needs

Stakeholders encouraged consideration of future needs rather than planning only around the current jail population. Several noted that Latah County's needs may increase over the next 20 to 50 years due to population growth, university-related activity, regional pressures, and changing public safety demands. A future facility was generally described as needing flexibility, expansion capacity, and the ability to support modern operations over a longer planning horizon.

At the same time, stakeholders cautioned against a project that appears excessive or disconnected from current needs. The feedback suggests that public confidence may depend in part on whether a future proposal is viewed as appropriately sized: large enough to function safely and efficiently, flexible enough to serve the County for decades, but not larger or more expensive than necessary.

Community Understanding and Public Support

Stakeholders repeatedly emphasized that public education will be essential. Many residents may not understand the condition of the current facility, the reason for the closure, the consequences of transporting inmates to another county, or the difference between City and County law enforcement facilities. Some residents may also view jail funding as less urgent than schools, roads, housing, or other visible public needs.

The interviews suggest that residents may be more likely to understand the issue if information is presented in practical, community-centered terms. Stakeholders pointed to several types of information that may be important to public understanding, including the cost of continued out-of-county housing,

the effect on law enforcement staffing and response capacity, the impact on courts and probation, the effects on attorneys and families, the risks associated with an aging and noncompliant facility, the options considered, the proposed scope and location, and the estimated taxpayer impact.

Several stakeholders also emphasized that doing nothing is not cost-free. Continued outsourcing, transportation, staff time, overtime, liability risk, and future construction escalation all carry financial consequences. This feedback suggests that a side-by-side comparison of options could help residents understand that the decision involves different costs, risks, and service impacts rather than a simple choice between spending and not spending.

Communication and Engagement

Stakeholders recommended a broad and consistent communication strategy. Suggested methods included public meetings, newspaper articles, social media, direct outreach to civic groups, presentations to chambers and service clubs, a dedicated project website, videos, facility tours, and clear printed materials. Several stakeholders emphasized that residents may need to see the facility or hear concrete examples before they understand the urgency of the issue.

Stakeholders also noted that Latah County includes distinct communities and perspectives. Outreach should reach Moscow residents, rural residents, smaller cities, university-connected populations, business owners, law enforcement supporters, justice system partners, families, and residents who may be skeptical of any tax increase. This suggests that no single communication method is likely to reach all audiences effectively.

Conclusion: Long-Term Jail and Public Safety Vision

The themes that emerged through stakeholder interviews describe both the immediate effects of the jail closure and the longer-term public safety considerations that may shape Latah County's planning process. While stakeholders varied in their roles, experiences, and level of direct familiarity with the jail facility, the consistency of several themes provides useful insight into the type of jail and public safety infrastructure stakeholders believe the County may need in the future.

First, stakeholders consistently described the jail issue as broader than the physical condition of one building. The closure of overnight housing has affected law enforcement staffing, transportation, probation coordination, attorney access, court-related processes, family visitation, and release planning. This suggests that the County's long-term vision may need to account for the jail's role within a larger justice system, rather than treating it only as a facility replacement question.

Second, stakeholders placed strong emphasis on safety, compliance, and functionality. Comments about the current facility focused not only on age and condition, but also on the limitations created by an outdated layout, inadequate separation, constrained meeting spaces, and limited ability to support modern correctional practices. This feedback indicates that a long-term solution will likely be evaluated by stakeholders based on whether it addresses operational safety and functionality, not simply whether it provides additional beds.

Third, the interviews highlighted the importance of local control and proximity. Stakeholders repeatedly connected a local jail facility to officer availability, court efficiency, probation contact, attorney access, family support, and the County's ability to manage its own public safety responsibilities. This suggests

that the long-term vision for the jail may need to reflect the importance of access, coordination, and responsiveness across the local justice system.

Fourth, feedback related to renovation and new construction suggests that stakeholders are concerned about long-term value. Renovation of the existing courthouse-basement jail was generally viewed as limited by space, age, expansion constraints, and the difficulty of meeting modern standards. At the same time, stakeholders expressed sensitivity to cost and project scope. This indicates that future facility scenarios may need to balance durability, size, and fiscal restraint in a way that residents can understand.

Fifth, public understanding emerged as a central issue. Stakeholders noted that many residents may not distinguish between the City police facility and the County jail, may not know why the jail closed, or may not understand the costs and consequences of transporting inmates to another county. This suggests that a long-term vision for the jail may also depend on a clear public understanding of why the facility matters to the broader community.

Finally, feedback related to communication points to the value of consistent, accessible, and varied outreach. Stakeholders identified public meetings, local news, social media, civic presentations, a project website, facility tours, and clear written materials as potential tools for helping residents understand the situation. This suggests that public engagement will remain an important part of the County's long-term planning, particularly if future decisions involve funding, site selection, or project scope.

Together, these insights detail a long-term vision centered on safety, functionality, local control, public understanding, and fiscal responsibility. Stakeholders generally recognized the need for a safe, compliant, and locally responsive jail solution, while also acknowledging that cost, scope, location, and public trust will heavily influence how future options are received. The feedback provides a foundation for Latah County as it evaluates alternatives and considers the type of jail and public safety infrastructure needed to serve the County in the years ahead.