

Item Title: Approval of Schematic Design for the Wake County Detention Center Phase 3 Expansion

Specific Action Requested:

That the Board of Commissioners approves Schematic Design for the Wake County Detention Center Phase 3 Expansion.

Item Summary:

Purpose: The Board of Commissioners reviews and approves Schematic Design for all new construction projects. This is an important milestone in the development of a building, park, major renovation, or significant capital project.

Background: The Phase 3 Expansion to the existing Wake County Detention Center (WCDC) has been planned since the original facility was opened in 2006. Although no new detention housing has been necessary since the opening of WCDC Phase 2 in 2012, recent trends in detention housing numbers have demonstrated a critical need for additional capacity as planned in this next phase of the Detention Center expansion.

The schematic design includes a new 200,000 SF detention housing building with a 600bed capacity of maximum security “wet-cells” across 10 housing units and a potential new 350-space parking deck. This design is informed by current detention best practices and is intended to meet the operational needs of the Sheriff’s Detention Division while providing a safe, durable, maintainable facility.

The Board previously approved proceeding with the Construction Manager at Risk construction method for this project in July 2025. The schematic design for the Wake County Detention Center Phase 3 Expansion was presented to the Board at the April 13, 2026 work session.

Strategic Plan: This action supports routine County business.

Fiscal Impact: Funding for schematic design is currently appropriated in the FY 2026 County Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The remainder of funding required for construction of this project has been requested as part of the FY 2027 – 2033 CIP.

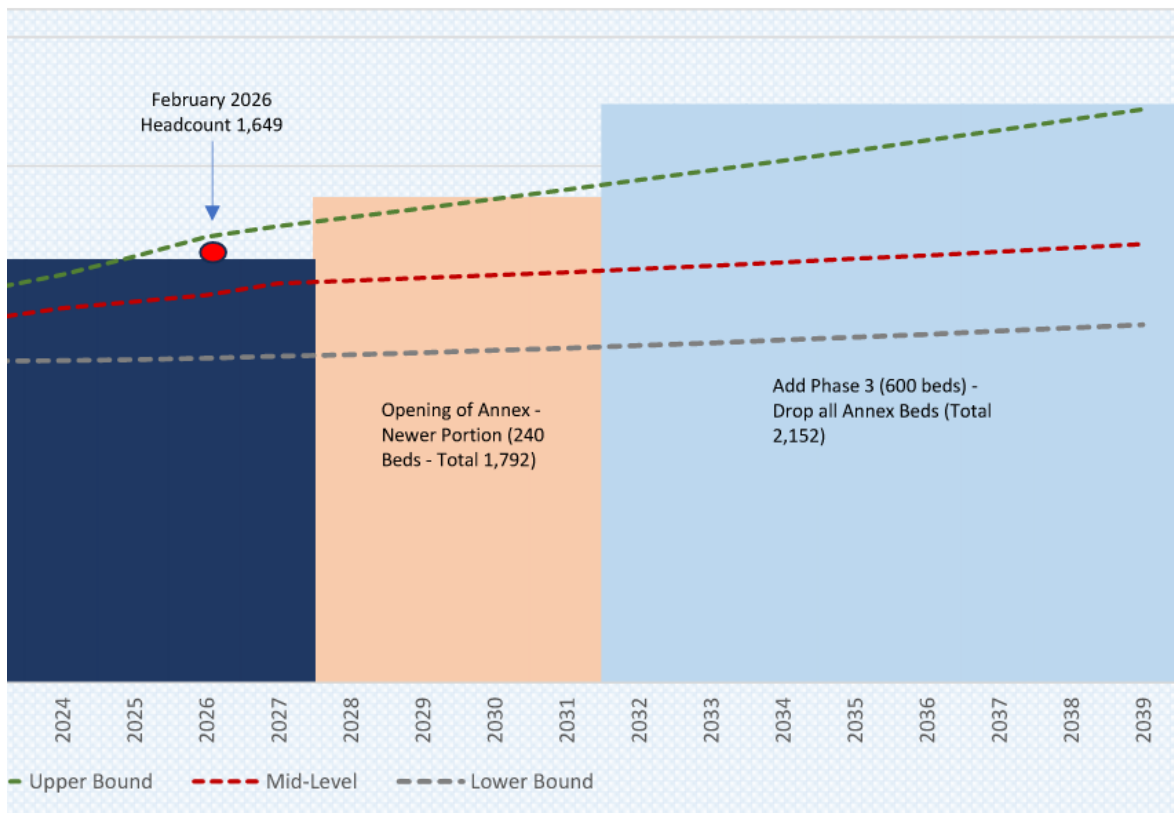
Additional Information:

The first phase of the Wake County Detention Center (WCDC) was opened in 2006 with a 416-detention bed capacity, and had been planned for phased expansion over 20+ years to accommodate long-term detention needs of the County. The last phase of

expansion (Phase 2) was opened in spring of 2012, bringing the Wake County Detention Center capacity to 1,088 and total County detention bed capacity to 1,552 – including the Public Safety Center.

Wake County periodically studies detention projections and housing options to understand the County’s detention housing and staffing needs, impacts of population growth and alternatives to incarceration programs and other factors in determining the need to expand the existing Wake County Detention Center complex. The master plan for the Wake County Detention Center had originally anticipated the need for all 4 phases of housing to be completed by 2030, with Phase 3 projected for 2019. However, with jail admissions between 2005 and 2022 decreasing significantly in comparison with population growth, adding detention bed capacity with the Phase 3 housing expansion did not become necessary until recently.

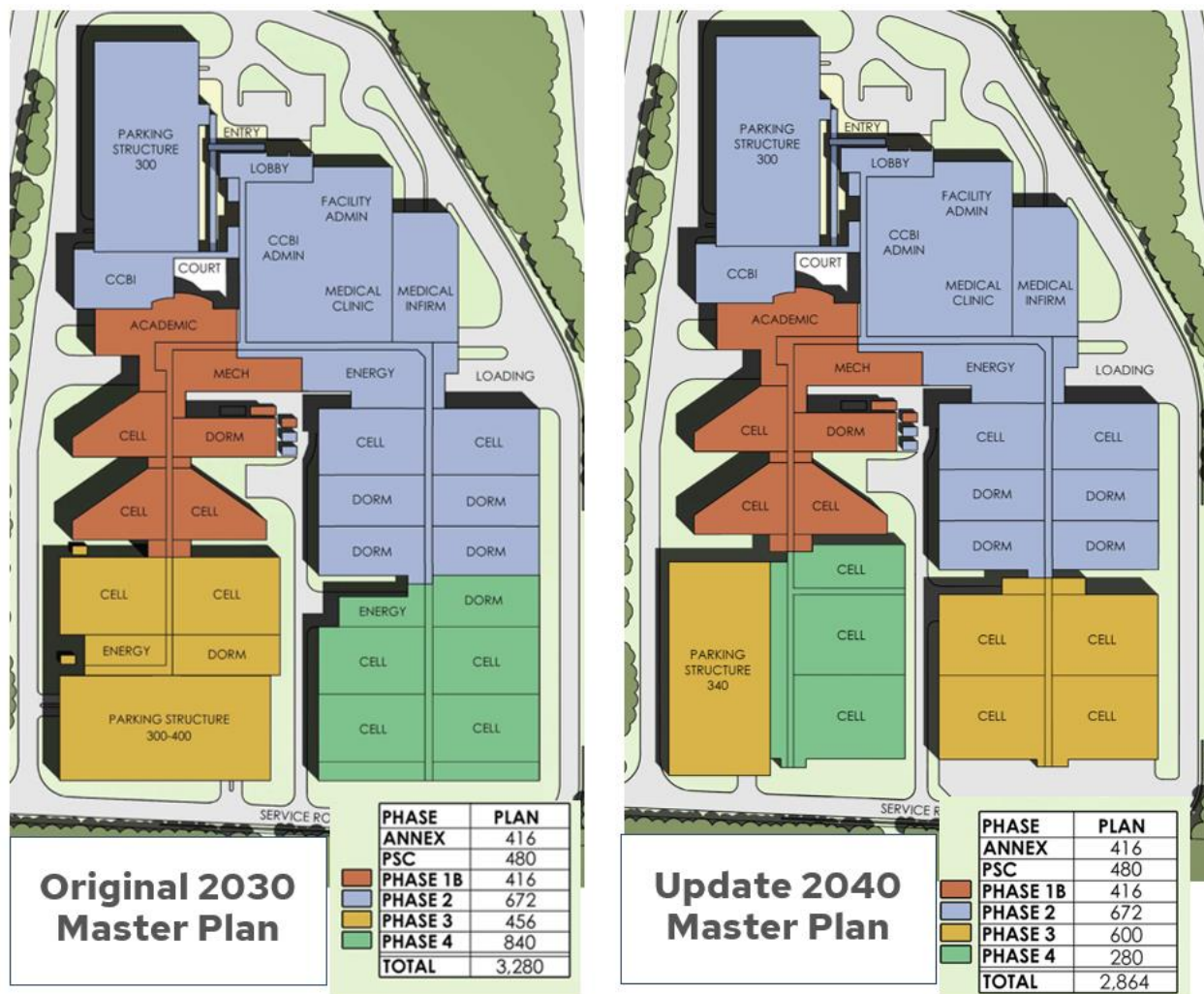
Currently in 2026, the County’s average daily detention headcount exceeds the total bed capacity available. The County is working to renovate and re-open the Wake County Detention Annex by early 2027 as a bridge for housing detainees until the Phase 3 expansion can be completed.



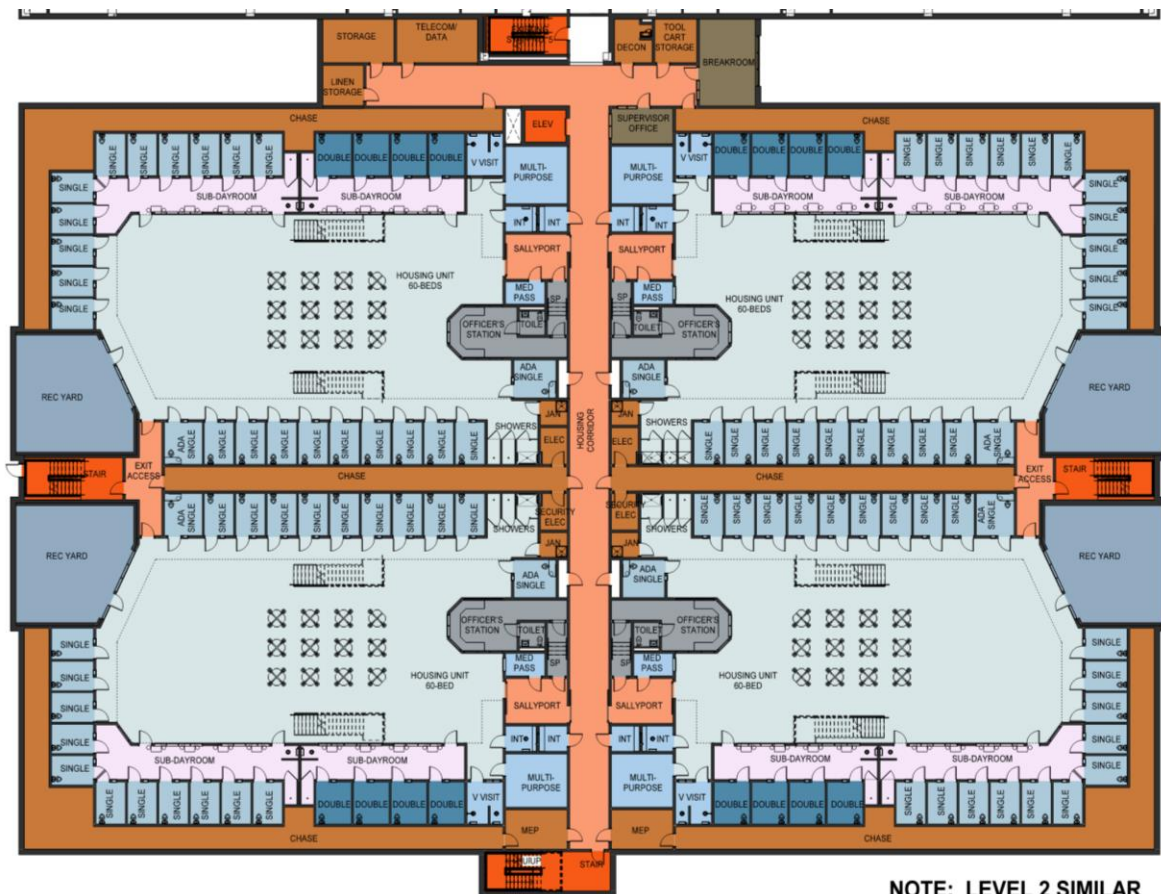
There are several factors that may be contributing to the most recent increases in detention population, including the implementation of Iryna’s Law (NC House Bill 307) in December 2025. However, even by 2024, when the County completed the last update of Detention Projections, there was a clear trend of increased average length of stay even as annual jail admissions decreased. During that time, security classification of inmates also increased significantly – from 13% maximum security in 2016 to 44% maximum

security in 2023. This trend impacts not just the number of beds needed, but the type of housing required. While Phase 3 of the Detention Center was originally planned to include six wet-celled housing units and three dorms, the current facility needs will now require all new housing to be wet-cell maximum security housing pods.

Phase 3 was originally planned to connect to Phase 1B, however, there are significant operational efficiencies that are gained from locating the new Phase 3 housing units on the end of the Phase 2 housing, which will also allow for potential future renovation of the Phase 1B housing while minimizing impacts to the new Phase 3 space. To maximize bed count in this Phase 3 footprint on a space constrained campus, the Schematic Design for Phase 3 housing now includes ten total housing units, each with 60 beds. A comparison of the original 2030 Master Plan for the facility and the updated 2040 Master Plan is below.



Each new housing unit is designed to be the same to maximize construction efficiency while providing the most operationally effective housing layout. Each housing unit will include floor level and tier level housing, with mostly single bed units that include detention grade combination toilet and sink fixtures. There will be four double bed units in each housing pod, and two sub-dayrooms per pod, which will allow Detention Division flexibility in separating groups within the housing pods. All detainees will have access to open air recreation space within the housing pod, meeting or exceeding the NC Division of Health Service Regulation requirements.



NOTE: LEVEL 2 SIMILAR

Throughout the planning phase, staff has spoken with peers in other counties and toured recently completed facilities from within the state, and neighboring states and as far as Ohio to understand lessons learned and current best practices in detention housing.

The facility will have durable finishes for safety and to minimize maintenance but will incorporate opportunities for additional recreation activities where practical. The design will focus on resiliency through supplementary connections to the existing central plant. The project will include a new central plant with high efficiency equipment to meet the heating and cooling needs of the building. Additionally, the mechanical systems will incorporate energy recovery components to minimize energy use while maintaining high air quality standards. The housing units will include water management systems and high-performance LED lighting w/ night lighting controls to ensure safety and reduce water and energy consumption. A solar Photovoltaic system will be designed for the full building roof area, and this system will be included throughout the preconstruction process as a construction alternate.

The housing building also includes a 3,500 SF remote academic area, to support expansion of the existing academic programming available to detainees at this facility. The project design currently includes a new 350 car parking deck, though this may be removed from the Phase 3 scope in favor of a new paved surface lot in the planned Phase 4 area, pending budget decisions.

The Construction Manager at Risk (CMAR) selection process is complete for this project and County staff are negotiating terms and conditions with the selected CMAR. The planning process is expected to be completed by spring 2027, a Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) contract is expected to be awarded and ready to begin construction by summer 2027. With an anticipated construction duration of 29 months, opening of the Phase 3 expansion is projected for early 2030.

Attachments:

1. Presentation