

[Sent to The B Square Bulletin at 9:14 p.m. May 25, 2026 by Monroe County Commissioner Jody Madeira. “Attached please find a joint statement from the Board of Commissioners, Mayor Kerry Thomson, Common Council President Isak Nti Asare, and County Council President Pro Tempore Peter Iverson.”]

A Responsible Path Forward for Monroe County

Monroe County has reached a hard and necessary decision point: whether to move forward with North Park as the site for a new constitutional jail facility.

No one should pretend that North Park is the outcome anyone hoped for.

A new jail is a serious public investment, and its location matters. Residents, advocates, service providers, attorneys, public officials, families, downtown stakeholders, and people directly affected by the justice system have raised real concerns about transportation, access, cost, reentry, treatment, proximity to services, the local economy, and the future of justice in our community.

We have heard those concerns. We carry them with us into the work ahead.

The current jail is inadequate, unsafe, and unable to meet the constitutional and operational needs of Monroe County. People are living and working there today. Their safety, dignity, and rights cannot wait for an ideal option.

Over the past several years, Monroe County has studied alternatives, reviewed potential sites, faced legal constraints, and debated the best path forward. Reasonable people have disagreed along the way. We cannot change every decision that brought Monroe County to this point. We can choose how we move forward from here.

This decision asks us to govern: to look honestly at the facts, accept the limits before us, and act with humility, urgency, and care.

Given the facts now before us, North Park is the only path to move Monroe County toward a safer, constitutional facility while preserving local decision-making and avoiding a more costly, uncertain, and adversarial process.

And should we choose North Park, then we must not reenact the mistakes that got us here in the first place. Our county and city government must be collaborative, practical, transparent, and accountable to our constituents.

Both the Mayor and members of city council have reached out to county leadership with the hopes that a city site might still be on the table for consideration with accelerated approvals.

Unfortunately, the attorneys for the ACLU have declined any further extensions to the agreement. This makes North Park the only viable option. Moving the jail out of downtown will affect more than the location of a building. It will change how attorneys meet with clients, how service providers reach people in custody, how people leaving the jail reconnect with housing and support, and how the courthouse and justice system function day to day. It also raises important questions for downtown Bloomington. The current jail site has long been part of the civic and economic life of downtown. City and county leaders must work together on the future of that site and on the broader effects this move may have on downtown businesses, public services, and county operations.

That planning should begin now.

While the responsibility for the building and operating of the jail is solely the county's, transportation to North Park, connections to the courthouse, economic impact to downtown, attorney and family access, service provider access, release and reentry logistics, downtown economic impacts, and possible future uses for the existing jail property impact the entire community. A shared plan should identify the decisions still ahead, who is responsible for each part of the work, when major decisions will be made, and how residents can continue to participate. We have already shown that a North Park transit plan uniting Bloomington and Ellettsville is feasible.

We have weighed the other paths available to Monroe County. Waiting longer will not improve the current jail, and it will not create a new site by itself. Renovating the existing facility will not solve the constitutional, safety, and operational problems that have brought us here. Letting the settlement agreement lapse would bring uncertainty, cost, and the risk that decisions will be shaped through renewed litigation rather than local public process. Transferring people to jails in other counties would move them farther from families, attorneys, courts, services, and community support while spending public dollars on temporary measures. Continuing to pursue a site within city limits remains an outcome some of us would have preferred, but the time required to make another site viable does not fit the legal, financial, and operational deadlines now before us, including the need to move forward with bonding by July.

These are hard facts, and none of them makes North Park easy. Even those of us who would have preferred another outcome have reached the same conclusion: doing nothing is not an option, delay is not neutral, and North Park is the best available path before Monroe County.

Our task now is to move forward together and make the next phase worthy of the community we serve.