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## Richmond jail plan advances but might have suffered fatal blow

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Contra Costa Sheriff's Capt. Thomas Chalk talks about efforts to add facilities and services at the West County Detention Center in Richmond on Aug. 11, 2015. (Kristopher Skinner/Bay Area News Group)

**MARTINEZ** -- Sheriff David Livingston's hotly debated plan to expand the West County Jail took a significant hit Tuesday after Richmond's county supervisor sided with opponents of the effort in a critical vote.

Although the Board of Supervisors voted to seek an \$80 million state grant to build a new wing at the county's Richmond jail, the prospects for securing the money dimmed because Supervisor John Gioia made certain matching funds wouldn't be available for the project.

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Gioia refused to back the jail plan amid concerns that the county won't earmark the millions needed to fully operate the programs to help inmates get treatment for mental illness and successfully re-enter society.



Contra Costa Sheriff's Capt. Thomas Chalk talks about efforts to add facilities and services at the West County Detention Center in Richmond on Aug. 11, 2015. (Kristopher Skinner/Bay Area News Group)

His vote, after more than four hours of debate, delighted dozens of people who opposed the expansion and frustrated his colleagues, along with Livingston, who accused him of ignoring the interests of the county in favor of his own district.

"He sure seems to pay attention to one city to the exclusion of others -- and that is Richmond," the sheriff said of Gioia after the meeting.

Gioia's vote was critical because a four-member supermajority of the five-member board was needed to sign off on more than \$6 million in local matching funds for the construction project.

With Supervisor Federal Glover still recovering from a heart and kidney transplant, Gioia's opposition means that the county's grant bid will be submitted, but it won't qualify for 12 out of the maximum 84 points under the state's scoring system.

"I don't feel real optimistic that we will be very successful in getting this," Supervisor Karen Mitchoff, of Pleasant Hill, said after Gioia announced his opposition.

Gioia, who thinks the services will cost more than the sheriff's estimate, said that if times get tough, there is no guarantee that supervisors will fund both the new programs in the jail and services for former inmates who are back in their communities.

"When other law enforcement departments come before us and say 'we need more money for law enforcement,' frankly the money for re-entry (programs) always ends up being secondary," he said. Supervisor Mary Piepho, of Discovery Bay, accused Gioia of playing to opponents of the plan, who filled the supervisors' chamber during the morning session. She said his vote showed "a failure of leadership."

Livingston remained optimistic about the grant getting funded and pledged to work out a compromise with Gioia before the application deadline later this month.

Livingston has had plenty of choice words lately for Richmond, whose City Council voted to oppose the jail plan and has authorized a lawsuit to try to stop it. The lawsuit, which would challenge the plan's environmental impact report, could further lower the application's score in the eyes of state judges.

Contra Costa will have plenty of competition for the available \$500 million in grant money as counties across California seek funds to remake jails strained by a state policy requiring them to house many lower-level offenders who used to serve time in state prison. Alameda and Santa Clara counties are also seeking \$80 million grants.

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Seeking to reduce the inmate population at the county's high-security jail in Martinez, Livingston is proposing building a high-security wing at the West County Detention Facility that would house 416 inmates and provide them with access to job training, mental health counseling, education programs and a visiting center for their families.



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He would then remove the same number of beds at the Martinez jail, which he said was overcrowded and lacked program space.

The proposal, as required under the grant guidelines, focuses more on providing services to inmates than Livingston's two previous attempts to expand the Richmond jail. But it was still met by fierce opposition from residents who didn't want more money going toward jails and didn't trust Livingston to follow through on his commitment to improve programs for inmates and reduce capacity in Martinez.

"If you build it, they will fill it," Marianne Callahan, of Concord, told the supervisors Tuesday.

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Livingston agreed to have an independent auditor confirm that the beds will remain unfilled in Martinez, but he couldn't guarantee that the estimated \$4.4 million a year needed to fund the new services will materialize.

That will depend on future votes of the Board of Supervisors.

Gioia's vote was celebrated by opponents of the plan. "I feel really great that the proposal won't have much chance," said Richmond resident Claudia Jimenez of the Contra Costa County Racial Justice Coalition.

As for the three supervisors supporting the jail plan, they held out hope that if the state approves the grant, Glover will be back to provide the key fourth vote to approve the matching funds.

"If we had another member of the board able to return, that would make a difference," Supervisor Candace Andersen, of Danville, said, before acknowledging that she doesn't know how he'd vote. "It could make a difference."

During his presentation Tuesday, Livingston played a video of Richmond Mayor Tom Butt at a City Council meeting saying that the jail plan's lack of a booking center could be a "deal breaker."

The sheriff said such a center would cost \$10 million a year to operate. Afterward, he noted that crime and homicides are up in Richmond. "But, yet they want to oppose a jail," Livingston said. "It just amazes me."

Reached by telephone, Butt said the council planned to move forward with its legal challenge and criticized Livingston for not doing more to compromise with opponents.

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"It was sort of the sheriff's way or the highway all the way through," Butt said. "It doesn't seem like a good way to push an agenda."

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