

Meth prisons likely to be built in Boulder, Lewistown

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Methamphetamine treatment prisons will likely be built in Boulder and Lewistown within the next year, after a Department of Corrections selection committee wrapped up its final review of the proposals Thursday.

The six-person committee gave its highest scores to a 40-bed women's meth prison in Boulder proposed by Boyd Andrew Community Services of Helena, and an 80-bed men's facility in Lewistown offered by Community, Counseling and Correctional Services Inc. of Butte.

A final recommendation will be sent to corrections Director Bill Slaughter, who is expected to make a decision next Tuesday. "We're cautiously optimistic we will receive at least some piece of this," said Mike Thatcher, chief executive officer of CCCS. "We're excited."

The Boyd Andrew proposal scored the highest out of four submitted bids, beating out proposals for a 40-bed women's facility in Billings and a combined 120-bed prison for men and women in Lewistown also submitted by CCCS.

The men's prison in Lewistown was selected by default after that, since it was the only bid for a separate men's facility submitted to the committee.

David Armstrong, administrator of Alternatives Inc. of Billings, said afterward he was disappointed his company wasn't in the running, but called the competition "kind of grueling" and praised the other proposals.

"I hope this is just the start," he said. "I know we need a lot more (prison) beds like this in the state."

The 2005 Legislature approved a bill giving corrections officials the freedom, but not the money, to contract for some kind of meth treatment prison. Lawmakers suggested a 40-bed facility, although corrections officials said they wanted to triple the size of the project because meth is such a problem in Montana.

The Boulder prison, if approved, would cost about \$1.8 million a year to operate at \$125 per inmate, while the Lewistown men's facility would cost about \$3.4 million annually, or \$118 an inmate, department figures show.

Those figures do not include construction costs.

Boyd Andrew estimates its facility will open by next January and cost \$5.3 million to build. An estimated construction cost for the CCCS prison was not available Thursday, but the company hopes to open the facility by next April.

The lockdown prisons are meant for repeat offenders, who would undergo nine months of treatment followed by six months in a prerelease center and continued counseling after that.

The savings to the state will be substantial. Currently, it costs \$50,371 to house a male meth offender in prison for two years. Nine months of treatment at the men's meth prison proposed by CCCS would cost \$27,540, department spokesman Bob Anez said.

The state would save about \$20,000 going the treatment route for women offenders, he said.