

Corrections facility proposed

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ANACONDA — A Butte-based organization plans to propose a new 118-bed corrections facility in Deer Lodge County, officials said this week.

Community Counseling and Corrections Services is assembling a proposal for a new \$14 million to \$20 million facility to house the START Program, executive director Mike Thatcher said.

START is short-term placement for minimum-security male adult offenders who have violated the terms of their probation.

"This is an intermediate program," Thatcher told county commissioners Tuesday.

START, currently housed in a building on the Montana State Hospital at Warm Springs campus, was started as a three-year pilot program in 2005 through a contract between the state Department of Corrections and CCCS. That contract is up in December and the building is slated for closure, potentially leaving 37 people without jobs.

"We've got an existing program with existing people," Thatcher said. "If we don't put something together, we're going to lose them." But if CCCS could build a new facility to house the START Program and meet state needs, it could not only retain existing jobs but add up to 25 new positions, he said.

The organization, in response to a proposal request from the state for a 118-bed facility, is putting together plans for a new building in the Anaconda area to house the program. Four sites are under consideration: Arco land in the Opportunity Triangle; property near the Sky Haven Lodge at the county airport; Arco land at Highway 48 and Galen Road; county property between the wastewater treatment and arbiter plants east of town.

The proposal is preliminary — location, financing and building design all remain to be resolved before the pitch is made official, Thatcher said. But even early in process, he is trying to rally community support.

"We need everybody's help," he said.

The idea garnered support from audience members at Tuesday's commission meeting.

"The best jobs to attract and the best jobs to create are the ones you already have," said Jim Davison, executive director of the Anaconda Local Development Corp.

Others agreed the jobs are vital.

"I would encourage continued support from the commission and chief executive," said Rose Nyman, who is running for the commission.

County officials said the project would be appropriate use of either ARCo or county lands.

"It's a great thing," Chief Executive Rebecca Guay said. "The facility is already in the county. It saves jobs and it's going to grow. It's certainly an appropriate use for some of that land down there." The state will issue a request for proposals this month, Thatcher said, and they will be due by late summer.