



NEWSRELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New site needed for proposed northwest Montana prerelease center

A new site must be found for a proposed prerelease center in Kalispell after a survey of nearby property owners found opposition to the preferred location.

The Department of Corrections noted that administrative rules governing the siting of prerelease centers prohibit the agency from proceeding with development of a center at a specific location if public opposition is sufficient.

The survey, conducted by MSU-Billings, found that 74 percent of the 197 respondents oppose the proposed site at the southern edge of Kalispell. The poll targeted the owners of property within a half-mile of the location.

“It’s unfortunate that the public rejected the proposed site, but we respect their decision,” said Kelly Speer, the department’s Facilities Program Bureau chief. “The department remains committed to developing a prerelease center in Kalispell to serve the only major population center in the state without such a program.”

“I commend the extremely hard work by the local working committee whose members labored for more than a year to develop the project,” she said. “We’ll now decide the next step in pursuing our goal.”

The 2007 Legislature authorized creation of a prerelease center in Northwestern Montana. Prerelease centers help offenders as they transition from prison to communities and those who can benefit from a higher level of supervision in order to avoid prison. Offenders must have jobs and comply with strict restrictions on their movements each day during an average stay of six months. Prerelease residents receive treatment, counseling, education, job training and placement services.

About 800 offenders are in six prerelease centers in Billings, Bozeman, Butte, Great Falls, Helena and Missoula.

Although it does not have a prerelease center, Flathead County is the fourth largest contributor to corrections with more than 1,300 offenders in the system. The county has the fourth largest number of inmates in Montana prisons and ranks fifth in the number of offenders in community corrections programs.

In the past seven years, 899 offenders from Flathead County have spent time in prerelease centers elsewhere in the state. About half of those offenders have moved back to Flathead County after completing their prerelease stays.

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NOTE: Copies of all three public opinion surveys related to the project can be found at: <http://www.cor.mt.gov>