

Criminal Justice students present prison proposal

by Jackie Skaluba
LBJ Staff Writer

ACC students in the criminal justice program have presented a petition to the Alpena City Planning Commission which the commission reviewed along with 12+ letters from area residents at its meeting March 6. It should be noted that the petition is a student petition without the formal backing of the ACC Board of Trustees.

The long range purpose of the petition was to voice the students' support for locating a prison facility in the area. The short range purpose was to ask the commission not to remove the possibility of lobbying for a prison from Alpena's master plan before the positive aspects of a prison have been fully explored. Basically, according to the students, what they are hoping for is a factual investigation of the benefits to the area instead of an emotional lynching of the idea.

Their position is to view a prison as any other industry considering locating in this area. An industry looking into a new area will consider historical background, population, the characteristics of the local

economy, environmental resources, natural features, patterns of local development and community support before locating there.

According to Lee Ballard, assistant city manager, a prison is not a concrete plan for the area at this time. It's a suggestion, a possibility, an avenue to explore as the Planning Commission seeks ways to improve the economic climate of the area and it is contained in the master plan in that capacity.

Making, adopting and maintaining a plan that acts as a guide for the development of a community is the most important job of a planning commission. In formulating a blueprint for development, the Commission has conducted studies and taken surveys to encourage public input.

A brainstorming session called "Project 2000" took place at the Alpena Civic Center in May 1988 involving approximately 50 leaders from diverse areas of the community. By this means the master plan has been updated and kept current. The plan does not specifically focus just on a prison, but is simply looking at a variety of means to bring

jobs to the area.

According to ACC student Bruce Wozniak, a prison would be a good way to improve the area's economy with a "non-polluting industry". Alpena has seen a population decrease of 7.1% in the last 10 years as people leave perhaps in search of jobs.

A prison would bring some 300 jobs to the area, according to Wozniak, including construction jobs during the initial phase, support jobs such as linen and refuse services, increased power demand, cafeteria employees, secretaries and file clerks, in addition to corrections officers.

Alpena was under consideration as a possible location for the recently built maximum security prison in Standish. Some considered Alpena a superior site to Standish except in the area of community support. In the final analysis, Standish wanted the prison while Alpena seemed to resist the idea.

"Economic growth is essential for the survival of any community," according to Wozniak who was in attendance at the March 6 meeting of the Planning

Commission. He further cited stagnant or declining population figures in Alpena and surrounding counties as evidence of an exodus by residents searching for employment. "The bottom line is we need jobs".

ACC students cite Traverse City as an example of a community that has successfully integrated the "opposing" industries of tourism and prison facilities.

Opponents of a prison can, however, also cite examples at the opposite end of the spectrum to support their position. Resident Carol Spicer is a member of CAAP (Citizens Against an Alpena Prison) who has been investigating the issue since 1985.

She has looked at communities who have had to deal with the negative aspects of a prison in their community. In the fall of 1988, an inmate in the Lapeer facility escaped. Just this month the Chippewa Regional Corrections Facility at Kinross, experienced a disturbance involving 9 inmates and lasting approximately 1/2 hour. Spicer feels "the issue is polarizing the community".

In several attempts to become better informed,

Spicer wrote letters, contacted State Representative John Pridnia, (who conducted a survey on the issue) and attended informational meetings sponsored by proponents of the issue. Spicer found the meetings unsatisfactory in that answers to the questions of area residents were vague.

On a smaller scale, Alpena is already in the prison business. An addition to the county jail was completed January 23, 1989 at a cost of approximately \$400,000. By the end of next year, it should be completely paid for from monies received from a contract with Wayne County to house prisoners. There are approximately 32 inmates here at any given time through the exclusive contract with Wayne County. According to Steve Lockwood of the Alpena County Sheriff's Department, there have been no incidents with these prisoners, no problems, no escapes.

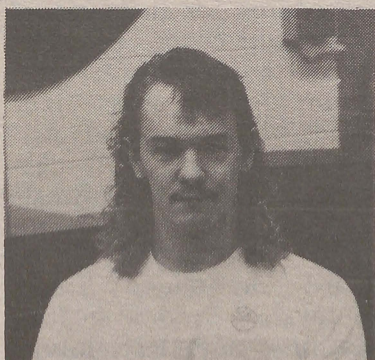
At this time, the issue is not whether or not a prison will be located in Alpena, but whether or not the mention of the possibility of a prison facility should be removed from the language of the master plan.

STUDENTS SPEAK

Should Alpena seek a maximum security prison?



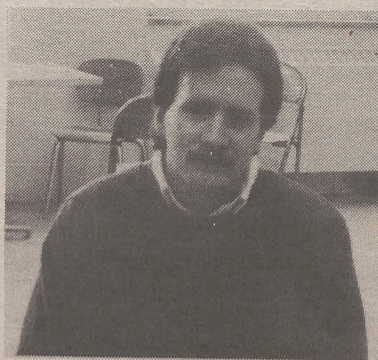
Pam Coddington--"I think it would bring a lot of jobs but I'm not sure. Might lessen property values. I don't want to see Alpena look like Jackson."



Woody Dagner--"Yes, I think they should. Basically for money brought into the community. It would create a lot of jobs."



Linda Geister--"Yes, because I think it will bring more money into community. It will give the unemployed a job. I would like one that has maximum security because I feel it would be safer."



Ed LeClair--"There's a wide variety of complications if we do. Economically, it could be a boost. Sociologically, there's such a wide variety of consequences it should be studied closely."



Happy Easter!

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