

# Road improvements stall jail plans

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Road improvements are the major stumbling block in negotiations for a 10-acre site on the Fore River on which to build the new Cumberland County Jail.

County officials initially believed the proposed \$1.25 million price tag on the land that is jointly owned by Merrill Industries and Guilford Transportation would include building a road and an underpass, county Commissioner Richard Hewes said Tuesday.

"Now we've learned they are not interested in improving the land for that price and we're not going to pay that kind of money for unimproved land," Hewes said.

The land, part of what is known as Transportation Park, between Veterans Memorial Bridge and the Congress Street exit of Interstate 295, is the county's

preferred site for the jail, though other options farther from the city are available.

The three county commissioners hope to meet later this week to discuss the negotiations and how to proceed, said Commissioner Joseph Mazziotti.

"I don't know the dimensions of the problem, but I'm hopeful and somewhat optimistic that it can be resolved," he said.

Mazziotti and Hewes said they do not favor the county making the improvements, which also would benefit Merrill and Guilford because they plan to develop the land around the jail site as an industrial park.

"In my mind, this is similar to a subdivision," Mazziotti said. "If you buy land in subdivision, you expect the improvements to have been made."

The commissioners would like to see

the road go under the railroad tracks and the Veterans Memorial Bridge and out to West Commercial Street, Hewes said. The only entrance now comes from the Congress Street side of the site and it is dirt, Hewes said, adding that the proposed road would be more than one-third of a mile long.

P.D. Merrill, president of Merrill Industries and the spokesman for Guilford on the project, was in meetings and not available for comment Tuesday, according to his secretary.

The commissioners hope to end any negotiations before Nov. 7, when county residents will be asked to approve a \$25 million bond issue to pay for land and construction of the jail, which would house more than 350 inmates.

Mazziotti believes the referendum could occur without specifying on which parcel of land the jail would be built. But it is crucial, he said, for voters to know

which community would get the jail.

A committee charged with finding the land analyzed seven sites and found the Transportation Park site the most convenient and logical for law enforcement officers in the area, especially those in Portland.

Putting the building in Portland would let the Portland Police Department close its lock-up facility at a savings of \$150,000 to \$200,000 a year, Mazziotti has said.

If the county cannot reach agreement with Merrill and Guilford, the commissioners would look to the next two sites suggested by the jail committee.

One option is land on outer Congress Street near the Regional Waste Systems incinerator — about an eight-mile round-trip for a Portland police officer — and the other is in Gorham near the proposed regional stump dump — about an 18-mile round-trip from Portland.