**Bad weather stalls building of county jail**

104-bed Newport facility to take 15 months to finish

**KENNETH BEARD, Staff writer**

Construction will soon begin on a new $8 million jail in Jackson County to replace its existing facility, which was facing imminent closure because of crowded conditions and its inability to meet state standards.

Officials had held a recent public meeting at the Laman Library in North Little Rock to discuss the plans for the new facility.

“We’ve been dealing with all that since 1999,” Phillips said. “I’m hoping we can begin work within a couple of weeks after all the water drains up.”

The new jail will replace the county’s 26-bed facility, which is across the street from the Jackson County Courthouse in downtown Newport. That jail was built in 1959 and has routinely violated state standards.

The Arkansas Criminal Justice Council has cited the jail as non-compliant with national standards, underscoring and having issues with the facility.

In 2008, an inspection team recommended the jail be closed for six months while workers replaced two heating units.

Jackson County Sheriff Terry Pettit said the county’s plan would cost the county $8.5 million, plus $800,000 for bookkeeping on expanding a locking area and getting new lights.

The county plans to begin the work on its new jail this summer and hopes to open it next year. The probation center will be closed after the new jail opens.

Voters widely approved both measures. The taxes will raise about $4 million annually.

If we hadn’t passed that tax, we couldn’t build a jail,” Phillips said. “This jail would have shut down, and we would have been out of costs transporting prisoners to other counties.”

Greene County voters supported the measure, voting 10 to 1 to support the jail.

Pickett said it will likely take three years to build a 104-bed jail that will be closed for two months during construction.

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The jail is overcrowded, and many new jails in recent years.

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Jail

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These included advertisements inundating adults and children with promotional material.

...on Madison Avenue. He said people...