

## \$8.9B Rikers Jail Replacement Program To Test New York's New Construction Approach



Manhattan's Rikers Island jail will be replaced with four new facilities valued at \$1 billion total. RFQs for the design-build projects were issued Feb. 4, 2020. *PHOTO BY CREATIVE COMMONS*

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Eydie Cubarrubia

In a Feb. 4 announcement seeking qualified bidders, the New York City Dept. of Design and Construction has taken its first crucial step in the design-build delivery of four new jails to replace the ubiquitous Rikers Island facility—potentially changing the local criminal justice system and providing a litmus test for the city's use of this project delivery approach.

The RFQs serve to short-list three vendors for each of four facilities, each worth \$1 billion, with the total replacement project worth \$8.9 billion: to dismantle the Rikers jail, build a temporary facility, design and construct a new Manhattan jail; clear an old facility in the Bronx and build a new one; and to design and build new jails in Brooklyn and Queens.

Due dates to submit qualifications will be in March for the Manhattan and Bronx projects and a year later for the other two.

Design-build aside, one industry expert says these first steps are particularly important because firms involved in the design and construction of incarceration facilities will shape the “correctional philosophy” of the city building it.

“There’s a lot of different types of jails designed differently, that have different correctional philosophies,” says Building Trade Employers Association president and CEO Lou Coletti—who 30 years ago oversaw construction of a jail in New Jersey’s Union County, in a prior role as its director of criminal justice.

“The way the jail will be built will be around all the programs you’ll have,” he says.

This importance is perhaps underscored by the 2018 renovations of the Horizons and Crossroads juvenile detention centers in the Bronx and Brooklyn, respectively. The facilities were built in the 1990s on a strict budget during a financial crisis, which saved money but didn’t provide for modern juvenile justice programs’ “level of therapeutic care,” [as ENR New York previously reported](#).

The revamp allowed the centers to better offer psychological and mental care, among other rehabilitative programs.

Coletti recalls how three decades ago, he spent several months visiting “five or six” facilities around the country with design team members whose input was crucial. For example, they noted the challenges of a constrained jail site in Elizabeth, N.J.

BTEA supported state legislation allowing design-build for certain infrastructure projects, [passed in 2011](#), as well as laws allowing the delivery for public projects by certain NYC departments, which [Gov. Cuomo signed Dec. 30](#).

Coletti says the procurement method will streamline what had been a process whose “rules and regulations are onerous,” adding that the jail projects to replace Rikers will “absolutely” be a key measure for the city’s design-build aspirations.

The DDC in June awarded an AECOM-led joint venture with Hill International a contract, worth \$107.4 million, to be the four facilities’ program manager. In a statement, Steve Morriss, AECOM president of design and consulting services in the Americas, called it a “first-of-its-kind transformative design-build program.”

Local officials also praised potential benefits.

Construction team members will “have a tremendous opportunity” to build facilities that “reflect the very best in modern correctional practice,” Dept. of Corrections commissioner Cynthia Brann said in a statement.

Elizabeth Glazer, director of the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, said in a release that she expected firms’ submissions would reflect “the magnitude of the transformation of the criminal justice system.”

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Eydie Cubarrubia is ENR’s New York regional editor. She has spent more than two decades editing, writing and producing award-winning business news and features content for The Guardian News & Media, New York Daily News and other publications.

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