The City of New York is embarked on one of the largest social infrastructure projects in its history.

Weighing in at $8.3 billion, the decision to close the group of aging jails (collectively known as Rikers) located on an island in the East River and the four jails located in four of the city’s boroughs is more than a construction project. The result of passionate advocacy from many, but prominently those who had been formerly incarcerated, the step to close Rikers also built upon New York City’s uniquely successful set of strategies that, since the peak of crime in the early 1990s, increased safety while reducing incarceration. In the past eight years, these trends accelerated, with a particular focus on increasing safety while retrenching the footprint of the criminal justice system from the lives and neighborhoods of Black and Brown New Yorkers. This policy brief takes the lessons of the past, the currents of this moment and the science that underlies it all to propose a way for New York City to realize its ambitions for a safer and fairer city and keep the promise to close Rikers.

Here are the seven actions the next mayor should take:

1. Use jail as a last resort by maintaining the smallest jail population possible while ensuring public safety: how an intentional, focused and coordinated strategy, guided by science and the city’s past experience, can produce more safety with approximately 2,200 in the four borough facilities.

2. Consider repurposing existing, smaller facilities and increasing hospital space as a strategy to provide appropriate care, reduce further the scale and capacity of the four main jails and provide flex space: how additional facilities at much smaller scale could advance better conditions and reduce the scale of the four proposed facilities.

3. Balance the value of detaining people close to home with equally important considerations: how a careful examination of the needs of the people incarcerated and the services provided could lead to better facilities at lower heights.

4. Tackle the long-standing culture of violence in the city jails: why violence is the major impediment to the transformation of the justice system and what to do about it.

5. Reduce the number of corrections officers to reflect the much smaller jail population and reap the savings: how a more efficient distribution of staff could lead to better conditions and lower costs.

6. Reassess the best approach to designing and building facilities that achieve the transformative goals of the project: why and how a different configuration of responsibilities could lead to better results at lower costs.

7. Create two new leadership positions to ensure the best plan for closing Rikers as part of a broader effort to transform the city’s approach to public safety: why leadership from the mayor and specific assignment of responsibility to key officials for day-to-day operations and decision-making is crucial to the success of closing Rikers and the justice system changes that lie behind it.