



Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee

Wednesday, November 26, 2008 – 9:00 a.m.
800 Livingston Blvd, Multi-Purpose Room
Gaylord, MI 49735

MINUTES

I. Call To Order

Chairman McBride called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM.

Members Present: John Burt, Jack Thompson, Joe Fitzgerald, Holly Ferguson (for Alexis Kaczynski), Rudi Edel, Lt. Blake Davis, Chief Joe Fitzgerald, Sheriff McBride, Nancy Morgridge, Brian Webber, Ken Glasser, Mike Hyde, Mike Turnbull

Members Absent: Paul Liss, Kyle Legel, Diane Rekowski, Don Koeppen, Mary Sanders, Gary Gelow

Others Present: Erma Backenstose, Det. Kevin Day, Matt Nowicki, Judge Janet Allen

II. Old Business

A. Criminal Justice Master Plan

1. Review of Chapter 8 (DATA)

There was a lengthy discussion on Table 1, Crime Trends by Year, and Table 2, Jail Count by Month. Some of the comments made during the discussion included:

Committee members felt that the crime trends table is misleading. Mr. Edel feels that while the numbers are stagnant, the complexity of crimes is actually increasing. The officers in attendance agreed.

Table 2 shows that there have only been four months (through October 15) that the jail was at capacity or overcrowded. Committee members discussed that, according to the National Institute of Corrections, the jail should not be beyond 80% full in order to adequately separate the prisoners by the severity of crime committed. Using the 80% capacity, the jail bed limit would be 27 beds which would mean the jail was operationally overcrowded eight of the nine months so far in 2008. The Committee members are afraid that the public will mistake the data to mean there is no longer a problem with the County's Jail.

Det. Kevin Day: Judges in our county take into account jail population when sentencing, which keeps many people from being sentenced to jail when they should be. Judge Allen responded that Judges do have to keep jail population in mind when sentencing. Another Committee member pointed out that we have to look at it another way, that if they don't need to be in jail they should not be sentenced to jail.

Judge Allen pointed out that the number of cases in District Court is down and asked whether there are enough officers to handle complaints. Lt. Davis responded that he believes there are enough officers. Chief Fitzgerald agreed, but feels that serious crimes have increased. Det. Day pointed out that with the poor economy, some officers aren't issuing tickets for petty offenses. Commissioner Glasser indicated that he has seen these trends before. In 2001 when he came on to the Board the jail was consistently overcrowded for a couple years, and then there were a couple of years where it dropped. It seems somewhat cyclical. Chief Fitzgerald said that he expects crime will increase again with the downturn in the economy.

The Committee also discussed the heavy use of alternatives, including the work camp, to keep people out of jail. Det. Day talked about other counties he works with where the Judges dictate that the County will house prisoners or house them out with other counties. He indicated that Otsego County is the County that he works with that seek to keep people out of jail. Judge Allen responded that the Judges in Otsego County want to work with the Board of Commissioners and the Sheriff to sentence people to jail that really need to be there.

The Committee also discussed the reports that they are hearing on changes with the state regarding the Michigan Department of Corrections. Mr. Edel reported that he is afraid that if they State lowers minimum guidelines, there will be more people in County jails. Mr. Turnbull stated that he believes changes in the MDOC's budget will unlikely have any significant effect on jail populations, however, what would have an effect would be if the legislature enacts further changes to the legislative sentencing guidelines.

2. Jail Cost Study

Mr. Burt presented the draft findings from the Jail Cost Study, which included:

- Simple renovation of the existing Jail – This option is not feasible since it cannot resolve more than a few of the current issues facing the jail due to its small size.
- Extensive renovation of the Jail – With the addition of the vacated city space, the existing jail could be remodeled to provide for all currently needed amenities. The cost to remodel the jail to 68-bed capacity with needed amenities is approximately \$6.47 million dollars. The limitation on this option is that there is not room to expand in the future, without extreme costs, and parking would be severely limited. The cost would actually be higher since the Chamber of Commerce's Information Center would have to be purchased in order to expand the building.
- New Construction – Construction of a new 68-bed facility at the old DNR property would cost approximately \$7.84 million dollars, which is roughly \$1.37 million more than the cost of renovating the existing jail. The cost of building at the new Industrial Park would be roughly the same, with the addition of \$35,000 to obtain a parcel of land.

The Committee discussed the costs at length. The members present all felt that it would be a waste of taxpayer dollars to try and renovate the current jail. The members felt that the timing is not right with the economic climate to try and pass a millage to construct a new jail. Their unofficial recommendation is to build a new jail, but wait for either the economic climate to be improved, or for chronically overcrowded conditions at the current jail to return to the extent that the County is forced to try for a millage. The Committee

wants the Citizen Jail Committee to make an official recommendation at the December 16 meeting, before the Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee makes its own formal recommendation.

3. Review of Chapter Conclusions

The Committee members listed the following as the priority recommendations for the short-term goals:

- Establish a Mental Health Court. Funding was just announced to try a pilot program in Otsego County.
- Establish a Mentoring Program, which will require commitment from citizens.
- Develop valid statistics on the use and effectiveness of jail alternative programs.
- Create a Restorative Justice Program.
- Establish a victim/witness room at the County Building. John Burt is currently working with the Prosecutor's Office to establish this room.
- Continue to track overall one and three year recidivism rates and determine a more thorough way of tracking recidivism.
- Build an updated Jail at the old DNR property at some time in the future. In the meantime, funds must be obtained to improve the ventilation system at the current jail. Note: This is a provisional recommendation pending input from the Citizen's Jail Committee.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:30 am.