



Jail Citizen Committee

Wednesday, March 28, 2007 – 5:30 p.m.
County-City Bldg, Room 100
Gaylord, MI 49735

MINUTES

Chairman Koeppen called the meeting to order at 5:34 PM.

Jail Committee Members Present: Don Koeppen, Mary Sanders, Daphne Cousineau, Scott Dunn, Diane Fisher, Diane Frankckowiak, Alma Harrison, Elizabeth Haus, Vern Kassuba, Bob Mammel, Mike McCarthy, Nancy Morgridge, Vic Oulette, Todd Sharrard, Ron Skoglund, Gary Waldo

Jail Committee Members Absent: Norm Brecheisen, Chuck Berlin, Kam Ensing, Bill Giles, Jim Mathis, Brian Morgan, Dwayne Snook, Jack Thompson, Don Tober, Tom Wagar

Following introductions, Mr. Burt discussed the need to have regularly scheduled meetings and for a Vice-Chairperson to run the meeting should Mr. Koppfen be unable to attend a meeting. Anyone interested in being Vice-Chairperson of the Committee was asked to inform Mr. Burt prior to the next meeting.

Mr. Koeppen discussed the purpose and objectives of the Committee. Some of those included finding out what the real facts involving the jail issue are, finding out what citizens want, finding out what citizens believe, and finding out why the citizens believe what they believe.

Marie Frick discussed her job as the Community Corrections Services Coordinator for Otsego and Crawford Counties. She also discussed the various diversion programs available as an alternative to incarceration, which helps reduce the number of inmates in jail. She works with non-violent offenders who are referred to her by the Court. Some of the programs she runs include a Community Service/Earned Release Program where offenders can earn time off their sentences by doing work at a non-profit organization. The Saturday Work Program is a client funded program for the District Court where offenders who would have served short jail sentences participate in a supervised work crew assisting in a community project on a monthly basis by performing community service. The focus of this program is on restitution. Probation Residential Services, which is paid for by the Department of Corrections, is an inpatient substance abuse treatment that may be offered in lieu of all or part of a jail sentence for substance-abusing offenders. NEMSAS (Northern MI Substance Abuse Services) provides funding to help offenders pay for substance abuse treatment. Ms. Frick reported that there are currently 9 people at the Transition House, 3 people in a residential treatment program, 7 in the MRT (Moral Reconciliation Therapy) Group to treat substance abuse, and 2 in work release. Ms. Frick went on to explain that one of the problems she encounters is that people repeatedly get kicked out of alternative programs. Mr. Mammel asked whether the tether program is used. Ms. Frick replied that it is very rarely used since the participants have to pay \$240 upfront and then a weekly charge for participation. Most offenders cannot pay the fee.

Judge Morse presented her viewpoint as the Chief Judge. She has been dealing with the overcrowding issue since she was first elected in 1990. The court tries to keep people out of jail through the use of alternative program, but there are people who repeatedly get kicked out of these programs. There has to be a place to put them if they are unwilling to follow guidelines for the programs. Mr. Mammel discussed the high percentage of State prisons that are from Kalkaska, Crawford and Otsego Counties. Judge Morse responded that sometimes the guidelines allow for offenders to either be sentenced locally or in prison. Judges will often send the prisoners to state prisons to keep the population down in the local jail.

Chairman Koeppen asked the Committee members to answer several questions by April 6, including: What do you want out of this process; what do you think is happening with the overcrowding situation; why do you believe it? The answers to these questions will help to formulate the questions that the consultants will use to poll the citizens. The consultants will work with the Committee members at the next meeting to finalize the survey questions. He also asked that the Committee members read the Governor's Taskforce Report prior to the next meeting.

Todd Seidell informed the Committee that there is a private group of investors who are interested in building a regional jail. It would be built west of Gaylord. During the discussion it was pointed out that even if they were able to build a jail, it will still take a millage for Otsego County to send prisoners there.

Members of the Domestic Violence Survivors Group discussed a failure in the judicial system that is resulting in abusers not being held accountable.

Mr. Dunn discussed the business owner perspective on the overcrowding issue. He believes this is a serious issue. After a failure, the first thing in business is to find out what works and what doesn't work. It is important for the citizens to ask questions and interview the officials. It is also important to find out what people are saying. People are immune to hearing how many people are in jail. We need to find out what is important to them. We also need to keep officials as far away from the process as possible. Mr. Mammel pointed out that it is important to not be too close to the subject in order to keep your perspective.

The Committee decided to continue meeting on the fourth Wednesday of every month at 5:30 pm. The next meeting will be Wednesday, April 25.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:48 pm.

Note: Due to the lack of room availability the Jail Citizen Committee meetings will be held on the Third Thursday of every month in the Multi-purpose Room of the Alpine Center (800 Livingston Boulevard).