

Meeting Minutes
Law and Justice Council
Wednesday, April 12, 2023 – 12:00 p.m.
Benton County Administration Building

Present

Dave Wheeler – Benton County Probation Manager
Eric Eisinger – Benton County Prosecutor
Ryan Brown – Benton County Deputy Prosecuting Attorney
Thomas Grego – West Richland Police Chief
Melissa Hedrick – West Richland Police Assistant to the Chief
Brian Ace – Citizen Member
Josie Delvin – Benton County Clerk
Chris Guerrero – Kennewick Police Chief
Tom Croskrey – Benton County Sheriff
Jon Law – Benton County Undersheriff
Rob Guerrero – Benton County Corrections Chief
Cameron Fordmeir – Citizen Member
Amanda Watts – District Court Administrator
Tiffany Runge – Superior Court Administrator
Jon Amundson – City of Richland City Manager
John Trumbo – City of Kennewick Council Member
Tom Glover – City of Prosser Administrator
Michael Alvarez – Benton County Commissioner

Called to order by Chief Guerrero at 12:01pm

Approval of Minutes:

February 22nd and March 1st, 2023 – Chief Grego made a motion to approve the minutes, Judge Joe Burrowes seconded, motion carried unanimously

Introductions

New Business

Discussions on any new requests from the Commissioners

Chief Guerrero asked if the council knew of any requests the Commissioners had, no feedback was given

Update on the status of Public Safety Sales Tax

Judge Joe Burrowes asks where we are at with Public Safety Sales Tax

Chief Guerrero asks if there have been any discussions with Commissioners, he has spoken to his council and had similar discussions

Council Member John Trumbo asked if there is a timeline for the Commissioners to have the ballot measure on the agenda

Chief Chris Guerrero mentioned he believed stuff had to be prepared by July for November ballot

Council Member John Trumbo – asking for reason getting to public in timely matter so we can get it out to the media prior to the Commissioner meeting

Judge Joe Burrowes asked Ryan Brown if he knows, Ryan Brown states there is likely a deadline but doesn't know if July is correct

Judge Joe Burrowes stated that it would be important to have it in the ballot pamphlet, but believes there is very specific guidelines

Deputy Prosecuting Attorney Ryan Brown recommends Chief Chris Guerrero discusses the deadlines with Matt Rasmussen upon his return

Council Member John Trumbo states that it is important and of value to be in the voter's pamphlet, it provides for a pro and con argument, you have a chance to respond

Sheriff Tom Croskrey stated it says on the state's website that May 26 is the deadline

Richland City Manager states it is showing different dates on Benton County website

Prosecuting Attorney Eric Eisinger states a good question for Commissioners is to provide what current services that PSST are provides and what will be added for the voters to be able to review

Citizen Member Brian Ace stated that it would be good to do the same for the different outside entities that PSST provides funding for

Council Member John Trumbo states that during the Kennewick levy, it was interesting because the minutes on the Kennewick School District Board when they voted to select persons to be on the committee. People applied and they voted on it.

Chief Chris Guerrero asked if the Board of Commissioners can make a request for the Law and Justice Council to write the ballot measure

Sheriff Tom Croskrey stated that he believes it will be conflict

Citizen Member Brian Ace stated that it would be hard to establish the committee if we don't know how the funds will be used, critical component, hard to recruit people without that

Chief Chris Guerrero stated that he believes previously that the Law and Justice Council did write it

Ryan Brown stated that the PA's office will review and ensure the ballot measure is within the guidelines and that the deadline in May sounds correct

Council Member John Trumbo stated that if you want to know what others think, listen to Kennewick Council audio from last night

Chief Chris Guerrero added that it was a healthy discussion about justice system

Citizen Member Brian Ace stated that it is an easier lift with municipalities doing it, and it may put pressure on County to act

Richland City Manager Jon Amundson offered to take the action item to discuss relevant deadlines with the BC election department

Clerk Josie Delvin stated that the county has already compiled a document to show what the PSST funds have been used for

Chief Chris Guerrero offered to take the action item to discuss all of these concerns and questions with Matt Rasmussen upon his return

Chief Chris Guerrero asked the group if they would be okay to have another meeting next Wednesday

Other Discussions

Chief Chris Guerrero began discussing staffing issues, holding offenders accountable and therapeutic courts help

Clerk Josie Delvin asked what the change in the drug offense and what the impact will be to Law enforcement

Chief Chris Guerrero stated that yes it will have an impact, affect the whole system, go from issuing referral to booking into jail

Clerk Josie Delvin stated that new laws that pass typically go into effect 7/1

Judge Joe Burrowes stated that from the court's standpoint, we have several cases on backlog, number of criminal backlog and civil, juveniles' number of youth on serious charges are at its highest, building will hopefully be remodeled soon because it's falling apart. Lastly, there is an attorney crisis in Office of Public Defense, lost the Benton County supervisor and will be a direct impact how we process everything. Believes commissioners are all aware of the number of challenges

Chief Chris Guerrero stated that all jurisdictions are aware, and the consensus is that we all want to know how we can help with dialogues. Holding people accountable is important for all jurisdictions

Benton County Probation Manager Dave Wheeler discussed that the Supreme Court is taking public comment on the current law, we currently can't put a warrant out, we must keep continuing the hearing. Presentation was made to rescind that rule, public comment closes in April. He will forward the link for this and his comments.

Clerk Josie Delvin mentioned that if the media is interested in commenting it seemed to help in previous issues to get the Supreme Court to listen

Citizen Member Cameron Fordmeier stated that in addition to misdemeanor topic, if we don't pass PSST, there would be no therapeutic court and law enforcement entities would be given all the referrals re: Blake bill

Judge Joe Burrowes stated that all court cases will continue to rise, all therapeutic courts come out of PSST and drug court as well. This will become an unfunded mandate

Clerk Josie Delvin stated that the courts are still catching up from two years of COVID backlog

Chief Chris Guerrero states that this is the reason behind the importance of getting a list of what each agency is funding

Commissioner Michael Alvarez arrived at the meeting

Chief Chris Guerrero began providing an update to Commissioner Michael Alvarez on what has been being discussed in the meeting thus far

Other Business

Commissioner Michael Alvarez discussed that they had met with the Commissioners in public meeting re: Office of Public Defense and believe they have some viable solutions. They are putting together some pieces of the puzzle and it should help retain and recruit. Next two weeks they should be making an announcement regarding this

Richland City Manager Jon Amundson announced he heard back from the BC Auditors Office and the deadline for submittal is August 1 for general election

Old Business

Completion of OPMA Training and notice to Katie Gillies

Chief Chris Guerrero reminded everyone to complete the OPMA training and send Katie Gillies the information

Public Comment

There was no public comment section as we did not have anyone from the public in attendance

Meeting Adjourned at approximately 12:46pm