

Meeting Minutes

Law and Justice Council

Wednesday, April 19th, 2023 – 12:00 p.m.

Benton County Justice Center

This Council meets about, and takes action on, issues pertaining to local criminal justice matters. This includes but is not limited to: Issues regarding jail management and DOC coordination, local crime trends and availability of criminal justice resources, sharing of information, personnel and infrastructure to reduce duplication of efforts and facilitate policing and supervision efforts to reduce recidivism and enhance responses to offender violations.

Present

Dave Wheeler – Benton County Probation Manager
Eric Eisinger – Benton County Prosecutor
Ryan Brown – Benton County Deputy Prosecuting Attorney
Jared Kelly – West Richland Police Commander
Melissa Hedrick – West Richland Police Assistant to the Chief
Brian Ace – Citizen Member
Josie Delvin – Benton County Clerk
Tom Croskrey – Benton County Sheriff
Rob Guerrero – Benton County Corrections Chief
Cameron Fordmeir – Citizen Member
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
Jay King – City of Prosser Police Chief
Michael Alvarez – Benton County Commissioner
Michael Clark – Benton County Sheriff's Office Lieutenant
Jennifer Azure – Benton County District Court Judge
Diana Ruff – Superior Court Judge
Matt Rasmussen – Deputy County Administrator
Brigit Clary – City of Richland Police Chief
Chuck Torelli – City of Kennewick Council Member

Called to order by Sheriff Croskrey at 12:01pm

Approval of Minutes (Action)

April 12th, 2023 – no approval, minutes have not been sent out

Introductions

Around the Room Introductions

Sheriff Croskrey introduced the new Chief of Prosser, Chief Jay King

New Business

- **Continued Conversation - Update on the status of Public Safety Sales Tax**

Sheriff Croskrey asked Deputy County Administrator Matt Rasmussen for an update on the status of PSST

Deputy County Administrator Matt Rasmussen discussed the timeline for getting PSST on the ballot was 8/1 and the explanatory statement is done by Prosecuting Attorney. He is getting clarity on submittal timelines for committees that prepare statements for approval and disapproval. He stated that the committee roster is due on a specific date. He stated he is going to be working with Commissioners to get members on the Committees. They typically want 3 pro and 3 against. He stated that they must be registered with Benton County and an active voter.

Katie Gillies posed the follow up question of where Benton County is at in the process with the company that was hired to assist in marketing PSST.

Deputy County Administrator Matt Rasmussen that each jurisdictions spending has been forwarded to the media company. We haven't sent anything about how the funds will be used. Probably a good idea to have that. Yakima's passed with that, and it may be helpful. May need to get more specific regarding what we will spend the funds on.

Sheriff Croskrey discussed that the last ballot synopsis had an outline of how the funds will be spent

Commissioner Alvarez asked if we could see what Yakima did and he stated he will reach out to Commissioners in Yakima

Sheriff Croskrey asked if we can all come up with a wish list and provide it to Matt Rasmussen

District Court Judge Azure asked how the committee gets formed and do LJC board members need to reach out to people?

Deputy County Administrator Matt Rasmussen stated that he believes the statute is silent on that

District Court Judge Azure asked if anyone been talking to people in the community, how can we assist but without stepping out of line?

Deputy County Administrator Matt Rasmussen stated that this committee is different than citizens advocacy group, they are just writing the statements

Citizen Member Brian Ace stated that with bonds and levies it is more presented as an opportunity than an appointed position

Deputy County Administrator Matt Rasmussen stated that the statute indicates that it needs to put out a good effort

City Council Member John Trumbo asked if there have there been any communications brought to the Commissioners about being on the pro or the con side

Deputy County Administrator Matt Rasmussen stated that they have received an email from Jerry Martin about being on an advisory committee but not on the pro/con team

City Council member Chuck Torelli asked if can elected officials be on this committee

Prosecuting Attorney Eric Eisinger stated that although he is not Mr. Torelli's attorney, it may be a PDC question

- **Legislative Impacts on the Criminal Justice System**

Sheriff Croskrey stated that there are no updates and asked for other business items

Other Business

Commissioner Alvarez wanted to provide an update regarding the Office of Public Defense. He stated that he and Eric Eisinger spoke about it, looked up some budgetary items and found that \$5 million was given to courts and jail for remote visits, there is some technology there and \$2.7 million put in 23/24 budget to address court needs. Yesterday the BOCC approved rate increases for OPD and for attorneys coming in the field. He stated that they worked to become more competitive and have given additional flexibility to OPD manager to ensure we can hire additional attorneys. Recruiting and retaining is very important and ensuring we are being diligent when hiring to hopefully bring longevity.

District Court Judge Azure asked that as far as the recruit and retain, is the plan to keep more in house attorneys or contract attorneys?

Commissioner Alvarez stated that they are going to be flexible in that. We want to work to alleviate the bottleneck and that he wants to know what people need

Sheriff Croskrey stated that this was a good job by Eric Eisinger for seeing this and thank you to Commissioners for working on taking care of it

Sheriff Croskrey stated that he wanted to close the meeting with a statement to Matt Rasmussen and Commissioner Alvarez. What can this committee do to help push the PSST movement forward?

Deputy County Administrator Matt Rasmussen stated that the first thing we can do is help gather members for the pro and con committees.

Public Comment

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

Meeting adjourned at approximately 12:24pm