

**Meeting Minutes**  
**Law and Justice Council**  
**Wednesday, March 13, 2024 – 12:00 p.m.**  
**Benton County Administration Building**

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.

Chris Guerrero – City of Kennewick Police Chief  
Tom Croskrey – Benton County Sheriff  
Lee Cantu – Benton County Sheriff’s Office Commander  
Rob Guerrero - Benton County Corrections Chief  
John Trumbo – City of Kennewick Council Member  
Cameron Fordmeir – Citizen Member  
Dave Neher – Interim Chief for City of Richland  
Dave Wheeler – Benton County Probation Manager  
Tiffany Runge – Superior Court Administrator  
Matt Rasmussen – Deputy County Administrator  
Eric Eisinger – Benton County Prosecutor  
Casey Kist – Benton County Corrections Lieutenant  
Thomas Grego – West Richland Police Chief  
Commander Kelly – West Richland Police  
Brian Ace – Citizen Member  
Kevin Kennedy – Citizen Member  
Laurencio Sanguino – City Attorney, Kennewick  
Jessica Foltz – City Attorney, West Richland  
Joe Burrowes – Superior Court Judge  
Josie Delvin – Benton County Clerk

Chief Guerrero called to order at 12:00

**Introductions**

Around the Room Introductions

**Approval of Minutes (Action)**

Chief Guerrero asked for a motion to approve minutes from February 14, 2024

Matt Rasmussen made a motion to approve the minutes, Sheriff Croskrey seconded, motion passes unanimously.

**New Business**

- **Regional Updates**
  - Sheriff Croskrey stated that they have 3 people almost done with backgrounds which will give them a full staff.

- West Richland Police Chief Thomas Grego noted nothing new except using PSST excess for new detective.
- Council Member John Trumbo gave a brief report – they are close to the end of selecting City Manager, safe to say that 4 people interviewed have been narrowed to communication to an individual. New member on city council, hit the ground running.
- City of Richland Interim Chief Dave Neher stated Richland PD should have a new interim chief coming on soon. Spoke with City Manager earlier in the week, selected and in office in the next 4-5 months for Chief.
- Superior Court Judge Burrowes said it's always busy in SC. Did totals on trials tried last year - 475 search warrants per month. They're doing a better job at keeping track of trials and the different types. Moved location to new area in Benton County. Restructuring and helping put more trials out.
- Superior Court Administrator Tiffany Runge stated they really began tracking during pandemic, tackling the backlog.
- Superior Court Judge Burrowes mentioned thousands of civil cases they had to work through. Commissioners gave them court Commissioners that helped alleviate the trials.
- City of Kennewick Police Chief Chris Guerrero said they want to advocate for the entire justice system, post pandemic, and all these things have gotten highlighted. Great job tracking so we can identify where we are.
- Benton County Corrections Lieutenant Casey Kist mentioned that they would like to discuss work crew. They currently they have about 5 people assigned, 25 people short, stipulated order of continuance, community service hours, when Laurencio was throwing out numbers. Asked what if we got someone to identify where we could assign folks to work crew and dismiss the charges. If we could add more of these orders. Want to bring to the table to discuss further.
  - Superior Court Judge Burrowes stated that the drug court has been utilizing community service and work crew, less than 5 days and find it important to utilize it.
  - City Attorney Jessica Foltz said they have realized that folks want to do work crew over jail time, some don't like how hard it is. But we want them to do something, but also want them to have legitimate community service. They have a lot of cases we do need to get resolved.
  - Citizen Member Kevin Kennedy stated in MH court states, they have MRT, two sections they must do community service. The people who do this feel empowered and enjoy doing something for the community.
  - City Attorney Laurencio Sanguino said remembers discussing this last year and Kennewick is open to it. Most defendants are eligible, minimum requirement doesn't exist, receptive to it, but want defendants to be aware of that.

- Benton County Clerk Josie Delvin discussed the tracking. The administrative office does track cases and by type and hearings/trials, resets, plea entered. Weighted based on what DC or SC gets entered for weighted case load study. You can see it on the court's website. Surprised about SOC's, that was standard practice previously. They have now moved into the jury assembly room, and for the first time it was used on Friday. Been great to have this room. Room capacity is 200, which is very helpful. Done with construction phases. Now on to PA's office.
- Benton County Prosecutor Eric Eisinger was excited to announce pulling together a strategic planning meeting to discuss PSST. Benton County needs to be a place where we are more intentional with different inputs from different cities and county officials. For example, the State BAR association is looking at lowering OPD case load capacity to about 1/3 of what it is now. Even if the state comes up with money for the OPD there aren't enough bodies. Instead of discussing all the problems we are facing, want to come to the table and discuss what we are going to do about these things. We also have public safety goals and the line getting from where we are today and where we are going is going to be challenging. As he is reaching out to everyone, Benton County is going to be a County that has a plan. Triage those problems and identify next steps. Paul Casey, leadership director of Tri-cities, will be moderating this discussion.
- Citizen Member Kevin Kennedy asked why we have a shortage of attorneys.
- Benton County Prosecutor Eric Eisinger said since there is no law school here, generally people need to have a reason to come to Tri-cities and no law school is a problem.
- Citizen Member Kevin Kennedy asked when this whole thing would take place.
- Benton County Prosecutor Eric Eisinger stated April 1 and mentioned how interconnected things are and how tackling one thing can often cause other issues.
- City of Kennewick Police Chief Guerrero stated that it's interesting when the state wants to hire cops, but it then creates a backlog in other areas.
- Council Member John Trumbo stated that most people here are involved in the system you all work in, he is not, and wanted to know for the April 1 meeting, how do people who have a concern become educated and become part of the solution. Not talking about the folks working in this area, but those that pay the taxes.
- Benton County Prosecutor Eric Eisinger stated that the Council is going to have interactions from the Chief but being a part of this meeting will help you then reach out to constituents.
- Council Member John Trumbo said that Tri-Cities is a place with no fences or boundaries. Stated that he asked this question the way he asked it as our city council bases their decisions on priorities. Priority decision making needs to be taking in a broader perspective that we have used up to this point.
- Benton County Prosecutor Eric Eisinger said the people of BC need us to get together and solve problems. Instead of handling this as individual entities, we should do it collectively.

- Council Member John Trumbo asked if you want everyone to attend.
  - Benton County Prosecutor Eric Eisinger said yes, I would like everyone to attend.
  - City of Kennewick Police Chief Chris Guerrero mentioned the benefit of Eric doing this, so as a jurisdiction we can go arrest people, but then the rest of the system is run by the county so now we can have a seat at the table.
  - Council Member John Trumbo said we need to be able to come together and tell the story.
  - Eric stated we need to come together and identify the issues as a group.
  - Benton County Clerk Josie Delvin said that not every department has an idea of what they do and not necessarily in detail, but what the impact is for each department as we interact.
  - Benton County Probation Manager Dave Wheeler piggybacked off that saying LE is going out and making arrests. SC mentioned here some time ago, juvenile court rules have changed and how warrants can be issued on juveniles. It does affect how we serve justice. This has been occurring since February 2021. There was a lot of effort around the state to change the rule, it went through public hearing process. Supreme Court looked at it and kept rule intact.
  - Matt Rasmussen said at the commissioners meeting on Tuesday, they approved court security on campus. Plan to hire 4 positions and allow the Sheriff's office to reduce how many deputies are assigned to court. BCES – next week they are going to approve modified interlocal to replace microwave unit. Radio tower project is progressing well. Last thing is discussion at Behavioral health advisory committee. Franklin county is looking at setting up a voluntary sobering center. He asked Benton County side if that is something that would be valuable to our area.
  - Sheriff Croskrey said yes, they would participate in sobering center.
- **Juvenile Intervention Meeting March 25<sup>th</sup>**  
City of Kennewick Police Chief Chris Guerrero stated ESD 123 got grant money to do juvenile intervention, adding some regional partners in there. Working on a referral program.
  - **Sequential Intercept Model (SIMS) Assessment April 2nd**  
City of Kennewick Police Chief Chris Guerrero sent out a meeting request for April 2<sup>nd</sup> for SIMS assessment, completely funded through the Department of Commerce. Came out of Dan Newhouse task force. Found in Yakima County, capturing a fraction of the actual number of overdoses, funding opportunities became wide open. Only doing 4 counties, doing it by June, Benton, Franklin, Grant. Hosting it at Kennewick.
  - **Public Comment**  
There was no public comment section as we did not have anyone from the public in attendance.

Meeting adjourned at approximately **12:59**