

Meeting Minutes
Law and Justice Council
Wednesday, April 10, 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
Josie Delvin – Benton County Clerk
Thomas Grego – West Richland Police Chief
Melissa Hedrick – West Richland Police Assistant to the Chief
Brian Ace – Citizen Member
Chuck Torelli – City of Kennewick Council Member
John Markus – City of Prosser Police Chief
Jon Law – Benton County Sheriff’s Office Undersheriff
Rob Guerrero - Benton County Corrections Chief
Jessica Foltz – City Attorney, West Richland
Tiffany Runge – Superior Court Administrator
Dave Wheeler – Benton County Probation Manager
Michael Alvarez – Benton County Commissioner
Charlie Dow – Office of Public Defense Manager
Cameron Fordmeier – Citizen Member
Kevin Kennedy – Citizen Member
Eric Eisinger – Benton County Prosecutor
John Trumbo – City of Kennewick Council Member
Diana Ruff – Superior Court Judge

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 March 13, 2024

Kevin Kennedy made a motion to approve the minutes, Chief Grego seconded, motion passes unanimously.

New Business

- **Regional Updates**

Chief Guerrero asked for updates on spending of PSST.

Kennewick - 8 openings, 1 regional academy. Staff agreed to wait until next Pasco Academy, quality of Pasco is higher success rate. Backfilling specialty positions and detectives.

Citizen Member Kevin Kennedy asked why it is successful for Pasco.

Chief Guerrero stated that it's successful because of its local and the updated curriculum. Trainers are our own people.

Commissioner Alvarez stated fire depts are also encountering the regional

Chief Guerrero said they used reserves to buy patrol cars and SROs, presented a strategic plan to the council.

Undersheriff Jon Law stated BCSO currently has 3 openings, anticipated retirement, not a surprise. 6 in various stages of training. Overall changes, animal control and thankfully the Commissioners have come to the table and picked a solution. Spending for sales tax, nothing has changed, few ideas how we want to reallocate.

Commissioner Alvarez said we are spending and allocating, all the cities have had to pivot. BCES had to move some funding. Go into an even split to go towards BCES.

Chief Guerrero talked about the juvenile intervention meeting and ESD123 grant. Based on referrals, been referring out to them. Hopeful for gang intervention. On 4/1 Eric Eisinger put on a public safety meeting. 4/2 sequential intercept meeting to discuss gun issues.

City Attorney Jessica Foltz stated that Mike Rio and she teach at the academy, and they have a great group in there now. 2/3 of the way through the curriculum. They changed the model at 7am, follow up with criminal investigation right after.

Chief Greggo stated that no change, fully staffed, PSST funds we are trying to bring on another individual due to pulling a detective from road. We had excess funds and wanted to use for another officer

Chief Markus stated they have 1 at the academy, 1 officer in FTO, 2 openings, PSST, spent for two positions and maintained

Council Member Chuck Torelli talked about PSST and getting phone calls about why we aren't paying for 911 towers. Not sure what the reserves are. I don't have a great answer. When I look at the Benton County website, I can't find anything about the reserves. How do you read each report. People are not finding the information they want to find. I need help to find fundamental information.

Commissioner Alvarez said we can put it all together as a county and provide. When it comes to BCES, we had some interesting convos, typically per population, voted that there would be 5 equal shares.

Council Member Chuck Torelli said Eric Eisinger came and gave presentation about PSST, for all the talks of the criminal justice system, we don't understand what each function is, maybe we need to spend some time to walk around and see what everyone does.

Commissioner Alvarez said he thinks it's important, stated that Eisinger, Dow, and he have had conversations and talked about four priorities, and we are looking at finding ways to continue to help OPD and attorney recruitment. Mental Health and substance abuse are also big topics for them.

Clerk Josie Delvin said they have 3 clerks that are new and have only been here 2 months. Can take 6 months. 2 openings and only 11 applications.

Council Member John Trumbo said he was on the phone talking to a citizen about the public safety tax. What caught his eye the most last night was the resistance to change. A systemic flow charge would be helpful. Also interested to see how we can effect change.

Chief Guerrero said he heard from City Attorney that trial dates are being set and it's bogging the system down.

City Attorney Jessica Foltz stated if we at least set the date, won't get dismissed due to not being timely. Certainly not a perfect solution.

Probation Manager Dave Wheeler said PSST is used as detention mental health services, progressive selection probation, therapeutic court and training. System wide, pressure is being applied to implode or collapse the system.

Citizen Member Brain Ace said not much else to add. Would like to mention the convos he has had with the lack of juvenile gang intervention. Undercurrent around that and hope it lifts higher.

Prosecuting Attorney Eric Eisinger said they just hired a former US attorney, also hiring 2 other attorneys. More fully staffed in the felony dept. Also speaking with LE and leaders in the area, moving someone into juvenile position based on need for a more robust system. PS meeting got everyone in the same room and discussed what they perceived as the biggest issues to be the biggest issues were labeled as mental health and homelessness. Recovery navigator is helping to get this moving along. Therapeutic courts going and the recovery center is under way. The biggest threat was identified as the OPD situation. System based problem that was identified.

Commissioner Alvarez said because he sees a lot of LE leadership here, OPD and the county, we have spent 6 million in OPD. WA State as a whole has only spent 5.4 million divided by 39 counties.

Office of Public Defense Manager Charlie Dow talked about the crisis we are facing is magnitudes bigger than the Blake decision. We have a calculator that considers every single change that has come up. I invite everyone to read the rules in their entirety. We cannot just offer flat fee contracts, must be hourly. By 2028, every office in OPD, for every 3 employed, staff support for each, investigator, and a mitigation specialist.

Judge Diana Ruff said superior court is looking to be more efficient, trying to get more cases out. One thing we are excited about using is a new jury room downstairs that is on the same floor as the courts. Give day back in testimony. Also working and have 2 staff working on audio. The audio is the record. Working to resolve those audio issues.

Superior Court Administrator Tiffany Runge said they are taking over two additional court rooms. Hired two additional people dedicated to run JAVS

Citizen Member Cameron Fordmeier said in the future when we talk about out of the box, prearrest diversion would be good to discuss.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 12:57