

COUNTY FACILITIES COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 1, 1995, 7:30AM
SPECIAL MEETING

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Billy King
Commissioner Rollin Shaw
Commissioner Marshall Faircloth
OTHERS: Cliff Strassenburg, Co. Mgr.
Cliff Spiller, Asst. Co. Mgr.
Judge Coy Brewer
Judge Beth Keever
Marsha Fogle, Clerk

This meeting was called to allow Judge Brewer to share court needs with the members of the Facilities Committee.

Judge Brewer told the Committee that as a result of "structured sentencing" courts will be making decisions that will affect jail population. He stated that structured sentencing allows the courts to do some things that heretofore have not been done. For instance, 50% of people in jail are there because of probation revocation. Now, the judges have the authority to sentence these people to 30 days in the county jail when they break their probation, as opposed to sending them back to the state system. Also, the judges may give a "split" sentence, i.e, put them on probation, but require them to spend 25% of their active time in the county jail. Class I misdemeanants now go to the state prison system, with structured sentencing if their sentence is less than 90 days they will serve it in the county jail. All of this will have an effect on our jail population.

Judge Brewer noted that there is no way capital cases can be moved through the system without three courts running every week. The same is pretty much true for administrative court and trial court. He said the civil cases are in great shape. One additional area of concern is domestic cases. He said the domestic court will have to be increased and also we are suppose to be providing courtrooms for workmans compensation hearings. A new system has been created to move cases more expeditiously through the system. However, in order for this system to work effectively, the court system needs to know what they have to work with as far as facilities are concerned. Judge Brewer said they need a minimum of two additional courtrooms.

Commissioner Faircloth expressed concern that perhaps the courtrooms are not being utilized efficiently. He noted on Thursdays and Fridays very few courts are in session. Judge Brewer responded that the appearance of empty courtrooms suggests the courts are not attending to business. However, in fact the very opposite may be the case. Example, once someone incarcerated knows a court date is imminent, a courtroom is available and the judge is ready to hear the case, they tend to be more amenable to pleading their case. If they plead, the courtroom is not needed, i.e. it is empty. Judge Brewer said the way to judge whether or not the court system is efficient is to look at the number of cases that are being moved, not whether the courtroom is empty. He stated it is impossible to have 100% courtroom utilization here or anywhere.

Commissioner King asked if more courtrooms were available, would the time spent in the county jail waiting for the case to come up be less than it is now. Judge Brewer said he thought it would definitely make a difference.

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Cliff Strassenburg noted that the County already has a plan for the construction of three courtrooms on the fourth floor. He also noted that we are looking to acquire a facility to house the "Day Reporting Center." He said the facility would also be able to house probation people, who currently take up space in our courthouse. Money in the form of a grant may be available to help up purchase a building and probation people would pay the county rent for the offices. This move would free up space on the lower level for county needs.

The consensus of the Committee was to endorse this need for the three additional courtrooms; however, no official action was taken. Mr. Dan MacMillan, Architect, for the fourth floor renovations, will be asked to come to our regular Facilities Committee meeting on February 16, so the committee can look at the courtroom plans for the fourth floor.

MEETING ADJOURNED.