



King County

Metropolitan King County Council Committee of the Whole

STAFF REPORT

Agenda Item:	4	Name:	Clifton Curry
Proposed No.:	2016-B0205	Date:	December 7, 2016

SUBJECT

District Court – Conference Follow-up.

SUMMARY

On September 7, 2016, the King County District Court provided the Committee of the Whole with an overview of its proposal to pilot a Community Court Program in King County. Community courts are a type of “problem-solving court” that seek to address crime, public safety, and quality of life problems at the neighborhood level. Unlike other problem-solving courts, such as drug, mental health, or domestic violence courts, community courts do not specialize in one particular problem. Rather, the goal of community courts is to address the multiple problems and needs that contribute to social disorganization in one or more target neighborhoods.

Today’s briefing by the Court will update the committee on the Council’s actions related to the 2017/2018 Budget and the status of planning for the pilot project.

BACKGROUND

Community courts promote the use of community service and social service sentences in an effort to have the offender to pay back the community and get help to keep from re-offending. By promoting these alternative sentences, community courts seek to decrease both jail time and “walks”—sentences such as a fine or “time served” in which offenders receive no ongoing sanction despite pleading guilty to criminal conduct.¹

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¹ Henry, K., D. Kralstein (2011) Community Courts: The Research Literature A Review of Findings. New York, NY: Center for Court Innovation

courts vary widely in response to varying local needs, conditions, and priorities; but most community courts share several key features:

Individualized Justice. Community courts base judicial decision-making on access to a wide range of information about defendants.

Expanded Sentencing Options. Community courts have available an enhanced range of community and social service diversion and sentencing options, some of which are co-located at the court and some of which involve referrals to community-based providers; conversely, community courts seek a corresponding reduction in conventional sentences such as jail, fines, and time served.

Varying Mandate Length. Community courts develop a multi-track system, in which a (typically small) proportion of defendants receives medium- or long-term judicially supervised treatment for drug addiction, mental illness, or other problems, while the majority of defendants receive short-term social or community service sanctions, typically five days or less in length.

Offender Accountability. Community courts emphasize immediacy in the commencement of community or social service mandates and strict enforcement of these mandates through the imposition of further sanctions in response to noncompliance.

Community Engagement. Community courts establish a dialogue with community institutions and residents, including obtaining community input in identifying target problems and developing programs.

Community Impacts. Community courts seek community-level outcomes, such as reductions in neighborhood crime or repairing conditions of disorder through community service.²

Midtown Community Court Program

In 1993, the first community court was established in the Midtown Manhattan neighborhood of New York City. Nearly two decades later, at least 70 community courts are in operation around the world.³

Analyses of Midtown's first three years, from roughly 1994 to 1996, show that Midtown demonstrated a lower prevalence of jail and time-served sentences for all of the most common charges handled by the court. From 1994 through 1996, according to annual averages, downtown handed out more jail sentences than did Midtown for all the most common offenses: petit larceny (50 percent vs. 19 percent); prostitution (20 percent vs.

² Lee, C.G., F. Cheesman, D. Rottman, R. Swaner, S. Lambson, M. Rempel & R. Curtis (2013) A Community Court Grows in Brooklyn: A Comprehensive Evaluation of the Red Hook Community Justice Center. Williamsburg VA: National Center for State Courts.

³ Lee, C.G., F. Cheesman, D. Rottman, R. Swaner, S. Lambson, M. Rempel & R. Curtis (2013) A Community Court Grows in Brooklyn: A Comprehensive Evaluation of the Red Hook Community Justice Center. Williamsburg VA: National Center for State Courts.

10 percent); turnstile jumping (30 percent vs. 11 percent); unlicensed vending (5 percent vs. 2 percent); drugs (28 percent vs. 19 percent). From 1994 through 1996, according to annual averages, downtown also handed out more time-served sentences than did Midtown for all the most common offenses: petit larceny (12 percent vs. 1 percent); prostitution (40 percent vs. 1 percent); turnstile jumping (35 percent vs. 4 percent); unlicensed vending (36 percent vs. 6 percent); and drugs (19 percent vs. 2 percent).⁴

District Court Pilot Community Court Program

The District Court requested, as part of the County's 2017-18 appropriation for MIDD II, \$100,000 to support a study for the development of a Community Court. The Council adopted this request as part of its actions on the 2017-18 Budget. The District Court plans to use the proposed funding to hire a consultant to assist the Court in an implementation plan for community court. The court anticipates the consultant's report will identify necessary resources for successful implementation of community court with an estimated timeline for completion in 2017.

INVITED

1. Honorable Donna Tucker, Presiding Judge, King County District Court
2. Othniel Palomino, Chief Administrative Officer, King County District Court

⁴ Henry, K., D. Kralstein (2011) Community Courts: The Research Literature A Review of Findings. New York, NY: Center for Court Innovation