



Travis County Commissioners Court Agenda Request

Meeting Date:

March 11, 2014

Prepared By/Phone Number:

Criminal Justice Planning, 512-854-4415

Elected/Appointed Official/Dept. Head:

Judge Nancy Hohengarten, County Court at Law 5

Commissioners Court Sponsor:

Judge Sam Biscoe

AGENDA LANGUAGE:

APPROVE A RESOLUTION DIRECTING TRAVIS COUNTY DEPARTMENTS TO WORK WITH THE AUSTIN CITY MANAGER AND OTHER COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS TO DEVELOP AN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR A SOBRIETY CENTER.

BACKGROUND/SUMMARY OF REQUEST AND ATTACHMENTS:

The sobriety center concept was first implemented in the 1950s to provide intoxicated individuals a safe haven from the risks of being intoxicated and vulnerable in public. There are now sobriety centers successfully operating throughout the United States, including in San Antonio, Texas, and Houston, Texas.

In 2000, Travis County employees drafted a report proposing the creation of a local sobriety center to address the issue of public intoxication in our community. In 2002, an extensive feasibility study was completed surrounding the issue. The idea sat mostly dormant until 2011, when Travis County Criminal Justice Planning submitted a request to BJA for technical assistance to plan for and implement a sobriety center to be used as a jail diversion for a subset of the individuals arrested for public intoxication. This request was not granted.

In FY 2013, over 3700 individuals were arrested and booked for public intoxication in Travis County, accounting for 7% of the total number of

AGENDA REQUEST DEADLINE: All agenda requests and supporting materials should be submitted as a pdf to the County Judge's office, agenda@co.travis.tx.us by **Tuesdays at 5:00 p.m.** for the next week's meeting.

individuals arrested and booked for any offense during that fiscal year. Public intoxication remains a relatively unaddressed problem in Travis County.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

N/A

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

Travis County has explored and studied implementation of a sobriety center for many years. Community stakeholders have once again come forward to join in support of this effort. This resolution will provide direction to county departments and set a timeframe for planning. Collaboration with the City of Austin is paramount to successful planning, as each governmental entity incurs costs resulting from public intoxication arrests and each will benefit from the services a sobriety center can offer.

FISCAL IMPACT AND SOURCE OF FUNDING:

The current action will not have a fiscal impact. Implementation and operation of a sobriety center will, however, come at a cost. One of the functions of an implementation plan will be to identify costs and potential funding source(s).

REQUIRED AUTHORIZATIONS:

N/A

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, Travis County continues to look for creative solutions to address public safety issues related to public intoxication that are costly to residents of Austin and Travis County; and

WHEREAS, 3,754 individuals arrested for public intoxication in 2013 were booked at the Travis County Jail; and

WHEREAS, the Austin Police Department arrested the majority of the individuals charged with public intoxication, which costs substantial officer time; and

WHEREAS, the Travis County Sheriff's Office housed these individuals at a cost of \$96.71 per day in jail in 2013; and

WHEREAS, the Travis County Courts were required to appoint and pay attorneys to represent the 85 individuals charged with Class B public intoxication who were booked a total of 183 times; and

WHEREAS, hospital emergency rooms also receive public intoxicants that are costly to serve in a hospital setting and can be more effectively served in a non-emergency setting, resulting in increased availability for people who truly need emergency services; and

WHEREAS, the laws of the State of Texas allow a peace officer to transport an individual to a sobriety and detoxification facility in lieu of jail; and

WHEREAS, adequate treatment for alcohol and drug abuse cannot be provided for these individuals in the Travis County Correctional Facility due to the short length of stay; and

WHEREAS, detoxification from alcohol is a medical procedure best conducted outside of a correctional facility; and

WHEREAS, other communities in Texas and the United States have successfully utilized a sobriety and detoxification facility; and

WHEREAS, a sobriety center provides an opportunity to divert individuals with substance use disorders to treatment, which could save the City and County substantial dollars over time;

WHEREAS, there are many outstanding questions regarding the types of services that could be provided, the cost of building and operating a center, and the availability of federal, state, Travis County and City of Austin funds for the effort;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMISSIONER'S COURT OF TRAVIS COUNTY:

The Justice and Public Safety County Executive, the Travis County Sheriff's Office, Travis County Health and Human Services & Veteran's Services, and the Travis County Criminal Courts at Law are directed to work with the Austin City Manager and any relevant city departments, the Seton Healthcare Family, and community stakeholders to develop an implementation plan for a sobriety center.

The Justice and Public Safety County Executive and the other members of this collaborative team shall present the implementation plan to the Travis County Commissioner's Court by September 1, 2014.

ADOPTED: _____, 2014 **ATTEST:** _____

Samuel T. Biscoe
County Judge

Ron Davis
Commissioner, Precinct 1

Bruce Todd
Commissioner, Precinct 2

Gerald Daugherty
Commissioner, Precinct 3

Margaret Gomez
Commissioner, Precinct 4
