

**COMMISSIONERS' MINUTES
KITITAS COUNTY, WASHINGTON
PUBLIC MEETING**

WEDNESDAY

6:30 P.M.

APRIL 16, 2003

Those in attendance: Commissioners Max Golladay, Perry Huston and Bruce Coe.

Others: Shannon Carlson, Deputy Clerk of the Board; Sgt. Clay Myers, Sheriff's Department; Sheriff Gene Dana, Sheriff; Rob Degroot, Undersheriff; Joyce Julsrud, Clerk; Judge Cooper, Superior Court, Judge Haven, District Court; Greg Zempel, Prosecutor; and approximately 25 members of the community.

✓ **PUBLIC MEETING KITITAS COUNTY JAIL FACILITY COMMISSIONERS**

At 6:30 p.m. Chairman Max Golladay called the special meeting to order. Commissioner Huston gave a staff report and brief explanation of why the Board called the meeting. Commissioner Huston explained that there are inmates sleeping in the hallways and other places that weren't meant to be used as sleeping quarters. He went on to say that the safety of Corrections Officers is being jeopardized with all the "blind" spots in the jail. In the past the Sheriff's office has been able to limit the overcrowding by placing booking restrictions and home monitoring programs, but at this time they are unable to decrease the number of inmates housed at the corrections facility. The State has increased their mandates but decreased their funding. It is time to force the hand of the legislature and make them accountable for the responsibilities that they place on counties. One idea is to send the state the same jail contracts that the County has with the Cities, and if they don't sign and comply with the agreement then the jail will refuse to take "state" prisoners. Commissioner Huston clarified what a "state" prisoner was. A state prisoner is someone who is brought into the jail from a State agency such as Central Washington Police, State Patrol and Department of Fish and Game. Inmates sentenced up to one-year stay in Kittitas County, those sentenced for over a year are shipped to State Penitentiaries.

Commissioner Golladay explained the unfunded mandates and that last year District Court brought in 1.9 million dollars and out of that amount the State took 1.1 million. With the remaining revenue \$650,000 out of \$800,000, was spent trying to generate the \$800,000 in 2002. Commissioner Golladay expressed his idea of taking a bus of inmates, corrections staff and the media to Olympia and having lunch on the lawn in front of the capitol.

Commissioner Golladay opened the meeting up to public comments.

JODY ROWAN CORRECTIONS OFFICER expressed concerns for his co-workers safety because of the overcrowding. He stated that the highest the jail population has been is 126. He explained that if the Sheriff's Office could hire a few more people not as Corrections Officers but as Control Room Operators, the Corrections staff could be on the floor at all times. He encouraged the public to come in and see what stress a Corrections Officer goes through on a daily basis.

COMMISSIONER COE talked about his experience touring the jail. When he was taken to the recreation room he was showed a panel that would communicate to the control room if there was a problem, but the panel doesn't work. Inmates were sleeping on cots and sometimes there were 8 people in a room where it was meant to sleep 2-4. He said taking a tour of the facility is the only way to understand the problem.

PAT KELLEHER asked if the State pays anywhere for their prisoners and if there is a mechanism to make the State pay.

COMMISSIONER HUSTON said to his knowledge the State doesn't pay any counties for housing of State prisoners. The Department of Corrections has issued small payments. The mechanism to force the State to pay is to put them through the litigation process if they chose not to sign jail contracts with the County.

SHERIFF GENE DANA gave a brief history of how long the overcrowding has been a problem. Since 1990 they have tried to implement solutions to the overcrowding (i.e. home monitoring, booking restrictions etc.), but the ratio of inmates to Corrections Officers is still far too high. Since 1995 they have had many consultants come in and evaluate the corrections facility and give opinions on solutions. There are many safety concerns for both inmates and staff, and many things that are broken or that get broke by inmates.

SGT MYERS has the numbers to give people the idea. The two items that he is asking for is to 1. Reduce the Jail Population and 2. Increase Staff. If the state were paying for the housing of prisoners (misdemeanant crimes only) the revenue would have been the following:

2001 \$420,000
2002 \$788,00
2003 \$215,00 (to date)

As people could see, there is an increase. This is only for misdemeanor crimes and if we would have jail contracts. Right now of the 112 housed at the jail, 47 are state prisoners. Any inmates that are federal do reimburse the county but that is only a few, and it is not constant. The

number of responsibilities that the Corrections Officers have has gone unfulfilled, such as, taking the inmates to the law library, getting them medical attention, and taking them for recreation time. The additional staff that the Sheriff's Office is asking for is Control Room Operators. Having them will eliminate having a Corrections Officer in the control room and allowing them to be on the floor where they are needed the most.

COMMISSIONER GOLLADAY is still not convinced that the state will pay if the County doesn't make them aware of the problem. Until then the County keeps spending reserves.

COMMISSIONER COE made a comment that the local newspaper needs to do a more in depth coverage of the issue. He also expressed the importance of complimenting the Corrections staff for the effort that they have put forth; they have been doing a very professional job.

COMMISSIONER HUSTON explained that Benton County built a 750-bed facility. They built it on tax title property. Again Commissioner Huston went through the options of shipping prisoners to other counties. Initially the County would have to pay the bill, then they could bill the State. He is prepared to do that to keep the population under 100. He is open to any other suggestions that people may have.

COMMISSIONER HUSTON motioned to establish an action plan and call a special meeting for April 30th, 2003 in the Commissioners Auditorium. During this time the use for Juvenile Justice tax funds and Criminal Justice Tax funds will be discussed as a temporary fix to the under staff and over crowding of the Corrections Facility.

COMMISSIONER COE seconded the motion for discussion. He stated that there weren't many options left.

COMMISSIONER GOLLADAY said he would like to study on how many inmates need to be transferred, the minimum number of new hires, and how much they want to spend from the reserve. On April 30th he would like the detailed information.

COMMISSIONER HUSTON gave an estimate of hiring minimum Control Room Officers and transferring 15 inmates is would cost roughly \$40,000 a month and it is still not an acceptable amount to be housed in the jail.

COMMISSIONER GOLLADAY was concerned that the legislation will say, "since you have enough money to fund the temporary fix and the County should be able to take care of it permanently".

COMMISSIONER HUSTON stated that the people who came here tonight are here to help with the temporary fix to the problem, a "band aid" to call

it. They are the ones that need to carry the message to the legislation and make them see the problem.

SGT MYERS requested that at the meeting on April 30th, the Board not consider having the patrol officers make the choice of whether to book prisoners or not. It is a responsibility that they should not have to bare.

PROSECUTOR GREG ZEMPEL said that he feels like it is déjà vu all over again. The statement that this is a State issue is true, but representatives in the legislature are unwilling to listen. Mr. Zempel suggested that the only way to get people in Olympia to listen, is to pass an Initiative on the State tax distribution.

COMMISSIONER HUSTON doesn't disagree and asked if Mr. Zempel was the person to head up such an idea, because in order for this to work, someone needs to take a lead part.

PROSECUTOR GREG ZEMPEL stated that he was not willing to be the leader but would assist in putting together the Initiative. He said there are several leaders around the County including the elected officials that could take a lead in the Initiative.

COMMISSIONER GOLLADAY reminded the Board that there is a motion on the floor. Commissioner Golladay called for the vote. Motioned carried 3-0. **COMMISSIONER HUSTON** added the option of looking into an Initiative, as the Prosecutor suggested.

DESMOND KNUDSON added his comment that the County should quit paying the State. It would be the Kittitas County Tea Party.

CHARLES WEINDENBACH said getting the attention of the State is useful but the County should try and get other County's involved to form a coalition. He also wanted to find out what other State's close to Washington (Oregon, Idaho, California) do in these situations.

COMMISSIONER GOLLADAY said years ago there were counties that were interested in getting involved, but nobody wanted to take the lead and when it came down to facing Olympia, other counties backed down.

COMMISSIONER COE moved to adjourn. **COMMISSIONER HUSTON** second.


Motion Carried 3-0.

The Special Meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

DEPUTY CLERK OF THE BOARD


Shannon L. Carlson

KITTITAS COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
KITTITAS COUNTY, WASHINGTON


Max A. Golladay, Chair