

City Court Update – February 6, 2012

Thank you to the Mayor and City Council for allowing me to speak tonight and thank you for the citizens of Beech Grove for allowing me to serve you in this capacity. First I would like to thank all the City Councilors that have expressed their support for the Court and our efforts, I greatly appreciate it. I would also like to thank Judge Hunter for his service. Not only did he open our city court, but he has been an asset to the legal community in Marion County and Beech Grove for over six decades.

I have been very busy since the November 8th. One of my first acts as Judge was to appoint Cindy Johnson as the City Court Clerk, under Ind. Code 33-35-3-1. Cindy has been an asset to the Court over the past four years and I believe she will continue as such.

I spent December and the first week of January auditing the financial status of the City Court. With the help of the former Clerk-Treasurer, the Court Clerk, and the State Board of Accounts, I reviewed all the revenues, disbursements, and budgets of the last three years, 2009, 2010, 2011. The result of this review is in front of you. As you can see rumors of the court's porous financial health have been greatly exaggerated. I would also like to note that these numbers do not account for budgeted monies that were not spent, or man hours saved by no longer having to send our police officers to Marion Superior Court for trials. It is my belief that confusion over the Court's finances could possibly be from the way the budget reads. Currently the line items allotted to the Court are placed under the heading "Department of Law", so are the line items allotted for the City Attorney. According to Ind. Code 3-4-9 et al., the City Attorney and Department of Law are executive offices under the Mayor. Additionally the State Board of Accounts conducts audits of City Courts, independent of the executive branch. Thus, I would ask the City Council to remove the City Court from the Department of Law and place it under its own heading in future budgets. This will help end the confusion and spread of misinformation regarding the City Court finances.

As you know I have discussed expanding the range of cases the Court currently hears. While this is true, we first must upgrade the case management system we have in place. The system we currently use is cumbersome, expensive, and inflexible. In an effort to improve this program we have been working with the technology arm of the Supreme Court, JTAC. With their help we will be moving to a new system that is friendlier, easier to use, and best of all, free. Once in place the Odyssey system will result in a savings of just under \$10,000.00 during my term. JTAC has already visited the Court to test our systems. Once Odyssey is up and running we will then begin the process of looking to add new case loads. Additionally, in our discussions with JTAC we found they offered a grant to police departments for implementation of e-ticketing. We put them in touch with the Chief of police and our police force has begun the process of upgrading their ticketing systems, free of charge.

In addition, beginning April 3rd, the Court's hours will shift to 5:30pm on Tuesday. It only took a couple days on the bench to hear people say they would go ahead and admit the charges because they couldn't miss any more work. I believe the Court's schedule should not be an impediment to an individual's due process and under my watch it won't be.

Finally, in the State of the City address the Mayor told the public he had asked the State Board of Accounts to conduct an audit on the Court. I wish he would have spoken to me about this before making contacting them. I would have told him that I have been in contact with the State Board of Accounts on a weekly basis since taking office. State Board of Accounts conducts an annual audit on all city courts in the State and will not conduct spontaneous audits. However, they will sit with you on the phone and review your processes and protocols. The Court Clerk and I have reviewed all of the Court's procedures with State Board of Accounts and the Indiana Supreme Court's Disciplinary Commission. These agencies have given their approval and the Court's administrative processes are in good shape.

Thank you for your time and support as we continue to improve the City Court and provide the type of service the people of our great city have come to expect. Please feel free to contact me or the Court Clerk with any questions you may have. At this time I would gladly take any questions. Thank you.

Andrew J. Wells

Judge, City Court of Beech Grove