

9:59am Brian Smith
7/31/2018 Item IV.

OMAHA PUBLIC MEETINGS

focused on public engagement, resident input, and government accountability at the municipal level

July 31, 2018

Douglas County Commissioners
1819 Farnam St
Omaha, NE 68183

Dear Commissioners;

I am requesting that you withdraw your support for the proposed Juvenile Justice Center and its management by private 501(c)3 organization.

As noted in the July 29th editorial by Omaha World-Herald staff, you are losing the trust of the community you serve. As our elected representatives, you have obligations to us, the people. You are falling short but have an opportunity to rectify the problems.

To date, you have not engaged the public in the process of planning and approving a Juvenile Justice Center. Not one resident of Douglas County was surveyed or interviewed outside of people in professional roles.¹ You should understand that this exclusion has caused confusion, suspicion, and mistrust.

On July 30, 2018, I hosted a public meeting at UNO's Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center. We had nearly 60 members of the public attend to voice their concerns and contribute their ideas. They were very clear that they want to preserve the building at 420 S 18th St, improve services and conditions of our youth, and change the process by which the County makes decisions. Those comments are listed on an enclosure to this letter.

The residents of Douglas County are more than taxpayers. More than voters. More than riders on the journey we share. We deserve full partnership in ensuring our government works properly, improves services, and produces a better community. If we really value transparency and accountability, we should expect a transparent and accountable county government.

During this process, you have not exhibited transparency to the people you serve. Our community members do not understand your decision to reduce the County's capacity to care for our children in need of care. We do not understand your decision to fund a tax-raising \$120 million project without a vote. We do not understand your unwillingness to seek an alternative that meets the desires of our courts and attorneys without demolishing our downtown. You are losing our trust.

To show good faith to Douglas County, the residents, and the youth served by our institutions, I encourage you to cease progress on the proposed Juvenile Justice Center until we can develop and

¹ DLR Group/Chinn Planning, Inc. Final Report, Pages 6-7

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implement a decision making process that engages residents, meets our need for public transparency and trust, and creates an equitable solution for all the people of Douglas County.

I truly appreciate your consideration.

Yours,
Brian Smith
Omaha Public Meetings

Enclosures

cc: Paul Cohen, Omaha Douglas Public Building Commission
Ben Gray, Douglas County Unified Justice Center Development Corp.
John Christensen, Douglas County Unified Justice Center Development Corp.

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Notes from July 30, 2018 public meeting held at UNO's Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center

Questions and Concerns

- Social justice - since this will require out-of-county detention for overflow population, what are the outcomes for kids separated from family? How will families be able to manage transportation to those counties?
- Estimated out-of-county detention cost of \$95/day/person would increase costs by \$1MM year, not including transportation costs
- Out-of-county detention results in loss of oversight by Douglas County
- Safety concern in neighborhood
- Seattle is fighting this same issue. What can we learn from them?
- How do we deal with mental health services?
- Why no vote on this project?
- Have we studied sentencing issues? Will reduced detention capacity result in more children being charged as adults?
- Why this location? Will this end downtown revival?
- What evaluation methods would be used to show that the new building would be worth the cost?
- This seems like it benefits the legal community, not public, not kids.
- Where were the other proposed sites?
- Lack of transparency
- How does this address the root causes of juvenile detention?
- We need to address our history of institutional racism and how this project might extend problems
- Where is the data? Mental health, success of diversion programs, in-home detention, etc?
- Are historic preservation decisions a matter for local government?
- What is the accountability structure to address the other recommendations in the report?

Ideas and Suggestions

- Create a satellite court at current DCYC facility; move attorneys and courts
- Invest more in prevention
- Use video conferencing as is done by adult corrections, creating a "remote court"
- Change process by Building Commission to eliminate self-dealing
- Change process to eliminate outside influence by HDR, Kiewit, Burlington Capital Group
- Use methods like human centered design; ask users [actual juveniles served]
- Expand mental health services to prevent youth entering into legal system, and to expand post-release services to prevent recidivism
- Increase vocational training options
- Split the issues: attorney and court needs vs detention needs
- Use alternate buildings