

OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL · CITY OF SEATTLE

April 24, 2009

King County Executive Ron Sims
401 Fifth Avenue, Suite 800
Seattle, WA 98104

Councilmember Dow Constantine
Chair, King County Council
516 Third Avenue, Room 1200
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Executive Sims and Councilmember Constantine,

Last July, the County Council unanimously passed, and the Executive signed, Ordinance 16200 declaring “it is the intent of the council that the county should continue to be the primary regional provider of secure detention and community corrections programs.” The Ordinance also called for the Executive to negotiate a long-term extension to its jail services agreement with the cities. The Ordinance and the Executive’s signing letter are attached for convenience.

We agree that the County should be the primary regional provider of detention and community corrections programs. We urge you to fulfill this commitment as soon as possible by negotiating a ten-year (or longer) extension of the current agreement.

This is not a new position for the City. The only reason Seattle and the northeastern cities began planning to build a new jail two years ago is that the County expressed no interest in a long-term extension of the agreement that ends in 2012. Seattle has been developing alternatives to incarceration and has substantially reduced the number of misdemeanants in jail over the last ten years, but without access to County jail space, Seattle and the other northeast cities must have their own jail for misdemeanants in order to meet our basic public safety obligations.

There is much public confusion about the cities' need for jail space. Many citizens believe that because the County has resolved to provide jail space for the region, the cities have no need for a new jail. Others believe that the recent reported trends in the jail population should allow the cities to decide for themselves that they do not need a new jail.

The reality, of course, is that only the County can decide to give the cities access to County jail space. We know you did not intend to contribute to the confusion, but it exists nonetheless. One way to resolve it would be for you to offer the cities a new long-term agreement. Another would be for you to acknowledge that you cannot do so, notwithstanding any recent short-term trends. We would much prefer the former, but the latter would be an improvement over the status quo.

To help make this decision, it may be appropriate to expedite the current recalculation of the jail capacity forecast from several years ago. County Council staff has told us that bookings are trending below the earlier forecast and may suggest that the capacity needed for city misdemeanants will be available for the long-term.

In the hope that you will be able to offer a new long-term agreement, we offer these thoughts on its terms:

First, we believe the minimum extension that would allow the cities to stop or postpone planning a new jail would be ten years. With a shorter extension we would be compelled to continue planning for our own jail facility.

Second, we would like to ensure that the inmates for whom we are responsible live in safe and humane conditions and receive services that will be effective in reducing their recidivism.

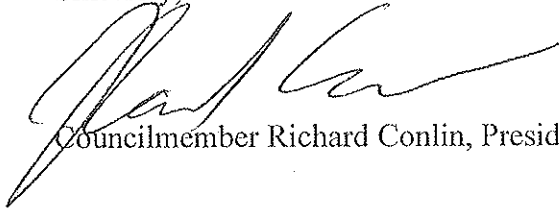
Third, we understand and respect the County Executive's position that a new regional partnership must allow the County to recover its costs, and look forward to improving our understanding of those costs.


We recognize the complexity of this issue. However, we believe we are at a point in time where strong leadership and collaboration can result in effective policy decisions consistent with your objectives as expressed in Ordinance 16200.

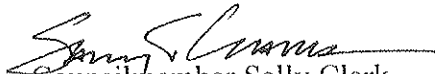
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Please let us know your thoughts and intentions on these questions as soon as you can. If you have any questions for us, please do not hesitate to call.


Sincerely,


Councilmember Richard Conlin, President


Councilmember Tim Burgess, Chair
Public Safety, Human Services, and
Education Committee


Councilmember Sally Clark


Councilmember Jan Drago


Councilmember Jean Godden


Councilmember Bruce Harrell


Councilmember Nick Licata


Councilmember Richard McIver


Councilmember Tom Rasmussen

cc:

Mayor Greg Nickels, City of Seattle
Marilynne Beard, City of Kirkland
Diane Carlson, City of Bellevue
Scott MacColl, City of Shoreline
Nina Rivkin, City of Redmond
Reagan Dunn, King County Council
Bob Ferguson, King County Council
Larry Gossett, King County Council
Jane Hague, King County Council
Kathy Lambert, King County Council
Julia Patterson, King County Council
Larry Phillips, King County Council
Pete von Reichbauer, King County Council

attachments