

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## THE SEATTLE COMMUNITY COURT

### START-UP, INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

*By*

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In March 2005, Seattle, Washington, became one of approximately thirty U.S. cities to open a community court. Like most of the other community courts started in the past 12-15 years, the Seattle Community Court deals with cases involving relatively minor offenses—most commonly theft, criminal trespass, prostitution, and failure to respond to a previous notice to appear in court on an ordinance violation charge. The Seattle Community Court is of particular interest, however, because from the outset it has deliberately focused on repeat offenders: persons who have had at least one prior conviction and in some instances dozens of them.

During 2007, The Justice Management Institute (JMI) has conducted a project designed to assess the experience of the Community Court over the first two years of operations. JMI's full report documents the planning and start-up of the Seattle Community Court; describes key organizational and operational features of the program during its first two years; identifies key issues relevant to expansion and institutionalization of the Court; and presents recommendations for dealing with these issues. This Executive Summary is a condensed version of the main report

### **Planning and Start-Up of the Community Court**

The Community Court program began on a pilot basis as part of the Seattle Municipal Court, focused on persons who committed offenses in the downtown business area of the city. This target population was a needy one, with individuals typically having problems that included some combination of homelessness, alcohol and/or drug addiction, mental illness, physical weakness or disability, illiteracy, unemployment, and lack of any social or family support. From the outset, the Community Court initiative has had the support of Seattle's downtown business community. Dave Dillman, Vice President for Operations and Services for the Downtown Seattle Association and its Metropolitan Improvement District was instrumental in helping to generate interest in the project and in obtaining start-up funding. The Metropolitan Improvement District in the central business core of the city has been a primary site for community service work performed by program participants. Within the justice system, the key actors were the leaders of the institutions involved in the day-to-day processing of persons charged with misdemeanors and ordinance violations:

- Municipal Court Presiding Judges Fred Bonner and (since January 2007) Ron Mamiya
- City Attorney Tom Carr and his principal deputy for public and community safety, Robert Hood
- Dave Chapman, Director of Associated Counsel for the Accused (the agency responsible for providing primary indigent defense services in the Municipal Court)
- Bob White, Chief Clerk of the Municipal Court

During the Fall and Winter of 2005, this core planning group worked—with the assistance of Lorri Cox, a senior member of the staff of the Municipal Court—to put

together a viable plan. As it developed, the plan drew on the experiences of other community courts, especially the pioneering Midtown Community Court in New York City and the Portland (Oregon) Community Court. It had several key features:

- An emphasis on “high-need” repetitive minor offenders, to be screened into the program from among newly arrested defendants in detention in jail.
- Procedures designed to provide swift justice – rapid acquisition of information about the defendant, speedy decision-making concerning entry into the Community Court, sentences of short duration, and rapid response to instances of non-compliance with sentence conditions.
- Linkage of defendants with needed treatment and social services – an initial assessment (made prior to acceptance of the defendant into the program) would identify the defendant’s key problems and social services needs, and conditions of the sentence would require the defendant to make initial contacts with appropriate treatment and social services providers.
- Appropriate sanctions, with imposition of a short term of community service (usually 16 hours [two days]) as a primary component of every sentence.

The program began with a bare minimum of new funding. A \$45,000 grant from the Downtown Seattle Association/Metropolitan Improvement District provided initial start-up funding and the Seattle City Council approved funding for two staff positions. To help gain community buy-in and support, the planners organized an advisory group that included citizen leaders from a variety of neighborhood groups, as well as representatives of the Seattle Police Department, state and local social services agencies, and other local government officials. This group also provided useful input into program plans, including recommendations for shorter periods of community service than initially planned. Importantly, key members of the core planning group—Presiding Judge Bonner, City Attorney Tom Carr, and Dave Chapman, the Director of Associated Counsel for the Accused—demonstrated their own commitment to the program by taking active roles in the Community Court’s courtroom proceedings.

### **Initial Implementation, 2005-07: Key Issues and Program Strengths**

The operational procedures of the Community Court during its first two years are described in some detail in Part 3 of the full report. The procedures proved to be effective, and most are still in effect as of this writing (mid-2007), though there have been some adjustments to enable the intake of a much larger group of defendants—including many not in custody—since the program began to expand in March 2007. Not surprisingly, some operational issues emerged during the program’s first two years.

#### ***Operational issues and concerns***

The operational issues encountered by the Community Court can be categorized under three main headings:

*1. Problems posed by the program’s participants.* The defendants accepted into the Community Court proved to be a very needy group. A summary prepared by

program staff in May 2007 summarized some of the salient characteristics of the persons who entered Community Court during the program's first 25 months:

- At least 58% were homeless, with an average length of 4.3 years without a home. Many of the others had unstable temporary housing with family or friends.
- 76% were unemployed, and had been without work for a long time. The average length of unemployment was 8 years.
- 49% reported having chemical dependency issues – drug and/or alcohol abuse. The average length of addiction was 11 years. (The actual incidence of substance abuse is thought by program staff to be considerably higher.)
- Perhaps surprisingly, the educational level was relatively high. 62% had graduated or completed some level of high school and 20% had completed some college.
- 12% were veterans.
- Two-thirds were male; one-third were female.
- The average age for both men and women was 39.
- The participants were a racially and ethnically mixed group: 48% were Caucasian; 29% African-American; 10% Native American; 6% Hispanic; 4% Asian/Pacific Islander; 3% other or unknown.

Given their sets of multiple problems, it is not surprising that many of the participants failed to meet all of their sentence obligations—i.e., complete two days of community service *and* make the mandated contacts with social services agencies. Often, for example, participants would perform the first day of community service but fail to report for the second day. Similarly, some would make initial appointments to go to the offices of social services agencies but then simply be unable to get to the appointments. Nevertheless, of the 667 participants accepted into Community Court during the first two years, 32 percent completed all of their sentence requirements and another 14 percent completed at least some of them.

2. *Resource limitations within the Court.* From the outset, the Community Court has operated on a shoestring budget, relying heavily on volunteers. Two types of resource shortfalls have been especially severe: (1) lack of trained probation personnel; and (2) inadequate management information systems.

The probation officer assigned to the program—Robert Lee—is widely recognized as having done extraordinary work handling a wide variety of tasks including conducting assessments of participants' treatment and social service needs, conducting orientation sessions for newly-accepted participants, transporting participants to work sites and sometimes to social services appointments, and providing direct one-on-one counseling. Robert Lee has been assisted by volunteers who help in conducting assessments, work with participants to enable them to make linkages with social service providers, and do much of the manual data collection and analysis needed to document

the work of the Community Court. However, there has been no apparent attempt to develop a cadre of probation officers or other personnel capable of doing the intensive multi-faceted case management that is clearly needed for the groups of high-need individuals who entered the Community Court during its first two years. As the program began to expand during the Spring of 2007, this need began to be felt even more acutely.

The Municipal Court's management information system simply could not handle the data collection and management information reporting needs of the Community Court. Knowing that it would be essential to demonstrate what had been done and what had been accomplished, the Community Court's staff designed its own data base and information reports. The staff has used some data from the Court's automated systems, but has relied heavily on manual data collection (including recording of data on participant characteristics, community service performed, social service contacts made, etc.) conducted by volunteers. It has been a very time-consuming and labor-intensive effort that will come under even more stress as the scope of the program expands during 2007.

*3. Resource limitations and systemic problems in the larger justice system and socio-political environment.* Many of the issues faced by the Community Court are issues faced by many types of social service delivery programs that seek to address the needs of individuals with multiple problems and very limited ability to help themselves. These larger "systemic" limitations on program effectiveness include:

- Very limited capacity to help participants follow through on initial contacts that they make with treatment and social services agencies.
- A lack of available housing—perhaps the most significant problem for a population that includes a large proportion of homeless people, and a problem that the City of Seattle clearly recognizes.
- A lack of ready availability of substance abuse and mental health treatment. Often it is not possible to get rapid assessments of individuals who appear to need such treatment, and without an assessment, it is difficult to get a place in a treatment program—especially a residential program.
- Lack of information (or, perhaps more frequently, difficulty in exchanging available information) concerning the substance abuse and mental health treatment histories of program participants. Without such information, treatment providers are often reluctant to accept a person into a program, and the wait for services sometimes becomes lengthy.
- Many of the individuals in the program have been charged with offenses committed in other municipalities in King County, and as long as the other cases are unresolved it can be difficult to place those individuals in residential programs or stable housing.
- As in many communities, there appears to be a shortage of programs and service designed to meet unique needs of women offenders. Females make up one-third of the Community Court participants, and their needs—including

child care and gender-specific treatment for chemical dependency and mental health treatment—are in many respects different from those of men.

All of the problems and issues discussed above are being addressed by the Community Court and its collaborating agencies, and progress is being made in overcoming the obstacles.

### ***Strengths of the Community Court***

The Community Court program itself has grown stronger since its inception, and clearly has many strengths. Key strengths include the following:

1. Leadership. The criminal justice system leaders in the Seattle—the presiding judges of the Municipal Court, the City Attorney, and the Director of the indigent defense agency serving the Court—have been unanimous in advocating for the Community Court’s non-traditional approach to handling repetitive minor offenders. They have also acted collaboratively in staffing the Community Court and they have personally participated in Community Court sessions.

2. Commitment and energy of persons working in the Community Court. One of the most striking things about the Community Court is the enthusiasm that everyone involved in the program—at every level, from the presiding judges to senior-level staff to volunteers—has for it. These practitioners are convinced that the Community Court is far more effective than traditional practices in providing meaningful justice for the participants and the community.

3. The Community Court’s operational procedures. The operational procedures developed by the planners have worked remarkably well, especially when considered in light of staff limitations. As the program expands, some of these procedures will need to be modified, but they have proven to be effective in bringing the original target population into the Community Court, in providing for rapid assessment and imposition of the Community Court sentence, and in getting defendants started on their community service work and on making linkages with social services agencies.

4. Support from external constituents. The Community Court’s base of support has developed substantially since the program first began. The City Council has provided funding for two key staff positions and will be considering additional support for fiscal year 2008. Additionally, during 2007 the City Attorney’s Office obtained a grant from the U. S. Department of Justice that will help support the program’s expansion to include a greater range of participants and develop a broadened base of support for community service work by participants.<sup>1</sup>

5. Development of partnerships with key social service providers. One of the initial sources of strength for the Community Court was existing partnerships that the Municipal Court had already established with the State of Washington’s Department of

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<sup>1</sup> The grant is from the Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), and is one of ten grants awarded pursuant to a competitive solicitation under BJA’s Community-Based Problem-Solving Criminal Justice Initiative.

Social and Health Services and with Seattle’s primary non-profit mental health and chemical dependence treatment provider. Both of these agencies already had representatives located in the Court Resource Center on the second floor of the courthouse. During the two-year start-up period, these partnerships have been strengthened. For example, late in 2006 funding was made available by the Mayor and the City Council to develop the *CO-STARS [Court Specialized Treatment and Access to Recovery Services] Program* that brings together the Community Court, the Municipal Court’s Day Reporting Program, the Neighborhood Corrections Initiative, and several key social services agencies.<sup>2</sup> The CO-STARS program was designed to respond to the most pressing issues facing the Community Court’s high-needs population—especially the need to engage program participants who failed to follow through on the initial linkages made pursuant to the Court’s sentencing order. The CO-STARS program seeks to enable a higher proportion of eligible persons to access needed services and benefits and to decrease the use of jail and court services.

### **Evidence of Effectiveness During the First Two Years**

This report is not meant to be a definitive examination of the impact of the Community Court or an evaluation of its effectiveness in achieving its goals. It is, however, intended to provide information relevant to considering continuation and expansion of the program. Working from preliminary data, it is possible to make some preliminary observations about the program’s effectiveness in achieving seven key programmatic goals of the Community Court:

**1. *Community service as a component of all sentences.*** As the planners intended, community service has consistently been a component of all sentences imposed in Community Court. According to the Community Court’s 25-Month Report, a total of 12,591 community service hours were ordered and 5,089 hours (40%) were completed by program participants during the first two years.

**2. *Rapid linkage of program participants with needed services.*** The Community Court’s 25-Month Report indicates that *successful* participants (i.e., those who completed all of their sentence requirements) completed an average of 3 social service linkages. These participants thus made at least initial contact with an average of three different treatment or social services agencies as recommended by the assessment conducted by Community Court staff. By contrast, the unsuccessful participants—those who did not meet all of the sentence requirements—made an average of only 1.4 contacts. As of now, there is no data to enable comparison of the longer-term outcomes (in terms of changes in living situation and repetitive criminal conduct) between those who made all of the required linkages and either (a) those who did not make all of the contacts; or (b) a comparable group of defendants who did not go through the Community Court process at all.

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<sup>2</sup> Housing services for defendants are provided through Plymouth Housing Group and Pioneer Human Services. Case management, life skills, and mental health and chemical dependency treatment services are provided through Sound Mental Health, the primary treatment agency serving the Municipal Court’s Court Resource Center.

**3. A reasonably high rate of compliance with conditions of the sentence.** 32% of the defendants in Community Court successfully completed all of their sentence requirements. The Community Court’s planners feel that this is an appreciably better “success rate” than for completion of non-incarcerative sentences than under traditional practices, and is better than the 30% success rate they had hoped for when the program started. Additionally, another 14% completed some of their sentence requirements.

**4. Less repetitive criminal behavior by Community Court defendants.** The extent to which the Community Court program helps to reduce recidivist behavior will be a primary focus of research to be undertaken in conjunction with the federal grant that is supporting expansion of the program in 2007-08. As of mid-2007, there is very little data on the impact of the program in reducing repetitive criminal activity. An evaluation report by the City of Seattle’s Office of Policy & Management in February 2007 compared a group of 66 Community Court participants with a group of defendants who had similar criminal histories and charge types but went through traditional criminal case processing prior to the start-up of Community Court. The recidivism data in this small-scale study showed little difference between the two groups: the Community Court defendants had an average of 2.9 new cases filed in the year after they left the program while the defendants in the comparison group had an average of 2.4 new filings.

**5. More effective court processes.** There is good evidence that this court effectiveness goal has been met very well by the Community Court. In particular:

- Defendants enter the Community Court very promptly after arrest—usually no more than five days after arrest (and four days after initial arraignment). Consideration is being given to shortening the time period still further by holding court sessions on Mondays and/or Fridays
- The judge presiding in Community Court engages the defendant directly, explaining the program and the opportunities it presents as well as the obligations under the sentence.
- Sanctions for the behavior that led to the defendant’s arrest are imposed rapidly. Usually a guilt plea is entered and sentence is imposed at the defendant’s first appearance in Community Court.
- Procedures have been developed to enable rapid response to non-compliance, working collaboratively with the *Neighborhood Corrections Initiative*—a joint project of the Seattle Police Department and the State Department of Corrections. If a defendant fails to meet sentence obligations or fails to appear for a scheduled court date, a notice that a warrant has been issued is sent directly to the NCI team, which will seek to locate and arrest the non-complying participant very quickly.

**6. Less unproductive use of time by criminal justice personnel.** The practitioners involved in the Community Court process—judges, court staff, prosecutors, defense attorneys, jail personnel, and others—clearly regard the Community Court as a much more effective way of dealing with minor offenders than traditional practices that

appeared to contribute to a revolving door system of criminal justice. From a cost standpoint, there also seems to be some savings in public defense expenditures because of differences in ways that attorneys for indigent defendants are compensated when cases are not resolved at the initial arraignment. The Office of Policy & Management calculated these savings at \$18,403 on an annual basis.

**7. *Reduced use of jail space.*** Although alleviating the City of Seattle's problems of jail overcrowding was only one of a number of goals sought by the planners of the Community Court, the program's role in helping to reduce jail bed usage has been of great interest to city officials. The evaluation report prepared by the Office of Policy & Management found that Community Court produced major savings in this area. The study found that defendants who opted into the Community Court spent an average of 6 days in jail compared to 19 days for defendants in the comparison group. That worked out to an estimated jail savings of \$369,911 during 2005-06. Taking into account the additional savings in public defense expenses and also subtracting the cost of two dedicated Community Court positions funded by the City Council, the report calculated the net savings over the one-year period of covered by the study at \$192,198.<sup>3</sup>

### **Program Expansion in 2007**

Beginning in March 2007, a major expansion of the Community Court has taken place, funded in significant part by a grant to the City Attorney's Office from the federal Bureau of Justice Assistance, pursuant to its Community-Based Problem-Solving Justice Initiative. The expansion has two principal components: (1) enlargement of the geographic scope, to encompass eligible minor offenses anywhere in the City of Seattle, rather than only the downtown area; and (2) intake from among out-of-custody defendants as well as persons in detention. Additionally, a third category of potentially eligible defendants has been added: first offenders who, in the course of screening for the City Attorney's diversion program, are identified as having significant problems that call for intervention by social service and/or treatment providers. From initial reports, this change in eligibility criteria has so far not led to the intake of significant numbers of first offender participants. However, the expansion to city-wide scope and the inclusion of out-of-custody defendants has produced a sharp upsurge in case volume since March 2007. The City Attorney's Office made more than twice as many Community Court offers during the April-June 2007 quarter than it had made in the previous three months.

From preliminary reports, it appears that the expansion may bring in a number of defendants who are somewhat more stable and less problem-ridden than participants in the first two years. It seems likely that they may be better able to comply with the terms of the sentences than were the participants drawn from the original target group. As discussed in the main report, the expansion raises a number of issues concerning the future operation of the program. Of particular concern: to what extent will the addition of large numbers of offenders with less serious problems and needs draw resources and opportunities away from the original target group of high-need "chronic public system users"? Will the program in the future have two somewhat distinct categories of defendants with different levels of social service and treatment needs?

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<sup>3</sup> Memorandum from Catherine Cornwall, Senior Policy Analyst, Office of Policy & Management, to Councilmember Licata, Chair of Seattle City Council Public Safety Committee, February 27, 2007, pp 2-4.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Principal Conclusions

From our preliminary assessment of its operations during the two year pilot period, the Seattle Community Court appears to have performed well with respect to two key sets of functions: (1) initial delivery of social services for minor repetitive minor offenders who do not pose a significant public safety risk; and (2) conducting adjudicatory proceedings that meet or exceed standards of good operations including effective case processing, appropriate disposition of cases, and compliance with court orders.

Despite operating on a very limited budget and with very limited staff resources, the program has resulted in significant savings in jail and defense costs, has been highly effective in incorporating the concept of *immediacy* into its operations, and has achieved a reasonably high rate of compliance with conditions of the sentences imposed on defendants. One of the key goals of the sentencing scheme developed by the planners—payback to the community by program participants, through performance of community service—has been fully achieved in about 32 percent of the cases over the first two years and partially achieved in a number of other cases. While the quantitative data on program impacts is at best very preliminary, there is no doubt that the practitioners closest to the program—the judges, attorneys, court staff members, probation officers, and volunteers—are convinced that the Community Court approach provides a better quality of justice for the defendants and for the community than traditional methods of handling cases involving non-violent repetitive minor offenders.

The preliminary data on recidivism of program participants is fragmentary and inconclusive, as is the data on actual utilization of treatment and social services by Community Court participants. And, at present, there is a paucity of data on the impact of the program in changing the lives of the persons who made up the original target group: the chronic public system users. There are a number of questions about the program's impacts on recidivist criminal behavior and on other aspects of participants' lives that simply cannot be answered on the basis of currently available data, because of the short history of the program as well as difficulties in collecting relevant data. For example, it will be relevant to learn whether (and if so, how) the linkages forged through the program contribute to reduced criminal behavior and improved life situations for Community Court participants. It will also be relevant to know whether some types of staff and other support for participants—for example providing short-term shelter housing for defendants released from jail to begin their required two days of community service plus assured transportation to the community service work site and to social service agencies—could result in significantly improved sentence completion rates and improved access to social services.

If the Community Court can utilize its unique position (as an entity with legitimate authority to impose sanctions for criminal conduct) as a foundation for successfully linking even a fraction of these defendants with effective treatment and social services, it can be a major contributor to improving the civic life of the city. At the same time—as the experience of the first two years of operations indicates—it can also be effective in imposing appropriate (though not unduly onerous) sanctions for conduct

that is unlawful. To perform both sets of functions effectively, especially with the program's scope having expanded substantially, we believe that it will be essential for the Community Court to have resources adequate to handle the substantially increased case volume.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations flow from our review of existing operations and consideration of the substantial increase in case volume as a result of the expansion of the Community Court—both geographically and in the inclusion of significant numbers of out-of-custody defendants—that has begun to take place in 2007.

1. ***The leaders of the Community Court program should develop reliable estimates of the volume and mix of cases likely to be handled by the expanded Community Court annually, as a foundation for assessing workloads and resource needs.*** Caseload size and case complexity are the primary drivers of resource needs in courts and the agencies that work with them. The charges in the cases that come into Community Court are not complex, but the problems of the defendants who come into this Court often require considerable attention and resources. As the Court expands and takes in more defendants, the resource needs will increase. It will be important to have an accurate picture of both the anticipated volume of new cases and the resources needed to adequately meet the needs of the defendants who enter the program.
2. ***In assessing workloads and resource needs, particular attention should be paid to developing a cadre of probation counselors, case managers, and support personnel who are capable of handling the high need population of defendants in the Community Court.*** The Community Court has been significantly short-staffed throughout its first two years of operation as a pilot project. The most glaring staff shortages were in the probation area, where a single probation officer had responsibility for very large caseloads of high needs program participants. The responsibilities of a probation officer assigned to the Community Court include a great deal of direct one-on-one attention to the needs of a generally dysfunctional—and often physically and mentally impaired—set of probationers who are not able to function well in getting to community service sites and to scheduled appointments with social services agencies. If the Community Court approach is to succeed, more probation personnel will be needed or, alternatively, some other way of staffing the Community Court with personnel whose skills and abilities meet the needs of the participants. Assuming that the staffing continues to be done via the Probation Department, the resources, training, and incentive/reward system for probation officers and other personnel working in the program need to be significantly upgraded.
3. ***Once anticipated workloads are determined, the Municipal Court should increase the number of Community Court sessions and revise existing procedures to enable more rapid entry of eligible defendants into the Community Court program.*** One of the basic objectives of the Community Court program—rapid entry of eligible defendants into the program—is undermined to some extent by the current practice of scheduling Community Court sessions only

on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday afternoons. The effect, for some cases, is to build in a lag of several days between the referral to Community Court that is made at the defendant's initial appearance (arraignment) and the actual Community Court proceeding at which a plea of guilty is accepted and the defendant formally enters the program. There is also a differential impact on potential participants depending on what day of the week they are arrested. Particularly in view of the significant expansion in the number of new cases coming into the Community Court, it seems desirable to increase the number of sessions to five days per week. That would have the effect of making the longest wait for entry approximately three days.

4. ***The City should provide adequate funding to support the operations of the Community Court, taking account of the increased workload and desirable enhancements of existing operations including expanded case management services, transportation capabilities, and the housing and treatment needs of participants.*** While more work needs to be done in evaluation of the impact of the Community Court program (see Recommendation # 7, below), the evidence to date supports expansion of the geographic scope of the program and a concomitant increase in funding to support an expanded program. At this point, little is known about the impact on caseload and service needs of the expansion to take in out-of-custody defendants. It will be important to document the changes in the composition of the caseload and to determine how (if at all) the expansion brings in subgroups of defendants with problems and service needs that differ significantly from those of the original target group. The anticipated size of the expanded workload will shape the resource needs. However, in allocating resources for an expanded program, City officials should be especially cognizant of the participants' needs for case management, transportation, and treatment for chemical dependence and mental illness.
5. ***The capacity of the Municipal Court to use automated systems to capture and analyze data on Community Court cases and participants should be substantially upgraded, in order to enable appropriate monitoring and evaluation of the program and to reduce reliance on manual data collection and analysis.*** In order to develop information needed for monitoring the program and providing information to program leaders and funding sources, the program's staff has relied heavily on manual data collection (done mainly by volunteers) and on development of ad hoc report formats generally done in Excel spreadsheets. As the program expands, the practice of relying on manual data collection and analysis by volunteers will become increasingly untenable. More support staff and/or volunteers will be needed simply to do what has been being done by the volunteers. With more individuals doing data collection and data entry, there is a heightened likelihood of errors and inconsistencies. Either the current case management software needs to be upgraded or software specific to Community Court must be developed, perhaps through adaptation of systems used in other problem solving courts.

High volume courts such as the Municipal Court are becoming increasingly involved in providing (or helping to provide) some type of pre- and/or post-

adjudication oversight of the behaviors and interactions of defendants with treatment and social service agencies. In order to do this effectively in individual cases, the judges and staff who deal with these cases will need to have ready access to much more detailed information about defendants and their performance in complying with conditions of pretrial release or probation. The Court and its primary funding agency source—the City of Seattle—should seek to put in place information systems that can provide the needed information and can interface easily with the information systems of other city agencies and private sector treatment and service providers. Information is the lifeblood of effective court and program management. It makes little sense to invest significant resources in programs and operations that do not have the management information needed to enable good management and internal monitoring. Without relevant and accessible information, it is not feasible to seek to hold a program accountable in any meaningful way for the efficiency of its operations or for the outcomes of its work.

6. ***As the Community Court program expands, provision should be made for training of personnel in the Municipal Court and in the agencies that are involved in the operations of the Community Court and in providing services to Community Court participants. The training should be both agency-specific and cross-disciplinary, so that personnel from all of the institutions and agencies involved in the program understand its goals, how it works, and what their own roles are.*** Social workers and treatment providers who have worked with the program's staff and participants often have a good general idea about it, but many key staff persons in relevant agencies are not familiar with it. Those who have not worked in the Community Court generally have little knowledge about it and are sometimes wary or skeptical about it. Particularly as the program expands, necessarily bringing in new staff involved in the Community Court itself and in the external agencies that provide needed resources, education and training will become increasingly important for those involved in day-to-day operations. Additionally, it will be desirable to educate those not involved in the program about the goals, general approach, successes, and challenges of the Community Court.
7. ***Further evaluation of the Community Court program should be conducted, in order to determine (a) the program's actual impact on the behaviors and lives of Community Court participants by comparison to the impact of traditional court procedures; and (b) the techniques and approaches that appear to be most effective in dealing with specific categories of defendants.*** The Community Court program has demonstrated that its operational procedures are viable, that it can save jail space utilization by comparison to traditional processes, and that it can be successful catalyzing linkages between the very needy initial target population and the social services available in the wider community. However, much is still not known about the program's potential, why it works, and how it can be modified to become more effective. To learn this, in more than anecdotal fashion, it will be necessary to conduct carefully designed research, optimally including experiments (including using random assignments to different types of

interventions) that can increase knowledge about what works for what categories of defendants.

A variety of experiments and quasi-experimental research designs that can produce useful information on alternative approaches to specific issues such as sentence length and availability of transitional housing can easily be designed by persons familiar with the program. Because resources are limited, it will inevitably be necessary to provide some Community Court participants with services that cannot be provided to all of them. It should be possible to take advantage of this situation to build in evaluation research that will enable study of these “natural experiments” and can produce useful information for future planning and policy development. To do this, of course, it will be essential to have: (a) qualified researchers knowledgeable about criminal justice and social services; (b) the capacity to collect and analyze information on the characteristics of defendants in the experimental and control groups; and (c) time and ability to make follow-up contacts and learn the impacts of the program over an extended period of time after participation in the Community Court program ends.

The original target group of the Seattle Community Court—repetitive minor offenders whose behaviors undermine the quality of life in the community—is one that has counterparts in virtually every other large urban area. The experience and results of Seattle’s efforts to address the issues posed by this group of non-violent repetitive minor offenders should be of interest to policymakers and criminal justice practitioners elsewhere as well as in Seattle. Evaluation research on the impacts and effectiveness of the Community Court program (and on possible variations of it) is important for the future of court operations and funding decisions in Seattle and in many other communities across the country. The current grant from the federal Bureau of Justice Assistance, which helps support the expansion of the Community Court program, includes funds for conducting research into the impact of the program on participants, particularly regarding defendant recidivism.

**8. *Consideration should be given to ways of adapting some elements of the Community Court program to the handling of other cases and defendants who are currently held in jail during the pretrial period or as sentenced offenders.***

As the Community Court continues to develop in the coming years, it will be useful to consider the extent to which concepts and techniques used in this program can be adapted for use with other offenders who fall within the jurisdiction of the Municipal Court. Particularly given the costs of jail (and the looming loss of capacity to use any space at the King County Jail), it makes sense to see if some aspects of the Community Court approach can be more widely adapted for use with defendants charged with other types of offenses than those handled in Community Court. Three aspects of the program seem especially promising as candidates for wider use:

- The emphasis on promptness and “immediacy” in operations, including early screening to identify cases eligible for the program, rapid entry into

the Community Court, swift imposition of sanctions, prompt linkage of defendants with needed services, and rapid response to non-compliance.

- The use of a non-incarcerative sanction—a short period of community service—that is much less expensive than jail and that provides a visible “payback” to the community.
- Assessment of needs and mandated linkage of defendants with treatment and social service providers. This is the core of the Community Court approach, and it seems likely that it can be used with a broader range of offenders. To do so however, it will be necessary to have (a) the capacity to conduct prompt assessments of defendants’ needs and enable crafting of sound conditions of participation in a program; and (b) case management resources, to help with orientation, transportation, and monitoring needed to produce meaningful engagement of the participants with the services available.

**9. *Efforts should be made to expand citizen participation in the Community Court, to strengthen ties between the program and the communities it serves.*** Unlike some of the community courts started elsewhere in the U.S., the Seattle Community Court did not emerge from a long period of interaction with neighborhood groups about key issues and priorities to be addressed through the program. Rather, it was primarily a thoughtful response on the part of local justice system leaders to what they perceived to be significant shortcomings in long-established practices. The downtown Seattle business community made important initial contributions to the planning process and has continued to remain closely involved and supportive. However, it was not until early 2005, when planning for the program was in an advanced stage, that an advisory group—including some representatives of the business community and neighborhood groups—was formed. Even today, the composition of the advisory group is weighted toward representatives of city government agencies and social services providers. Particularly as the Community Court program expands to cover the entire city and to bring in a wider range of participants, it seems desirable to strengthen the outreach to community groups. Some progress has already been made in this area, with the development of new community work sites, the engagement of more business and neighborhood groups in helping to supervise the work done by program participants, and the initial development of plans for an informational website for the Community Court. Greater community involvement is likely to lead to improved communication between the citizenry and the justice system leaders, and ultimately to better understanding of issues and improved delivery of services.