



City of Yakima

News Release

Subject: Community Court Survey

Contact: City Prosecutor Cynthia Martinez – 575-6033

Communications & Public Affairs Director Randy Beehler – 901-1142

Release Date: Wednesday, May 6th, 2015

Survey to Gather Input on Potential Yakima Community Court

As part of its ongoing process to evaluate the potential for establishing a community court, the City of Yakima is sending out a survey to just over 600 people who live or own businesses in the downtown area and the North First Street district to gauge their interest in using the innovative approach to address not only criminal but social issues.

The survey began being mailed out today. Responses have to be received by the City no later than Friday, May 22nd. The survey is being provided in both English and Spanish. The homes and businesses that will receive a survey were randomly selected in order to ensure the scientific validity of the results. The survey is being distributed in an area roughly bordered by Walnut Street to the south, Gordon Road to the north, 5th Avenue to the west, and 6th Street to the east.

An online version of the survey is also available in both English and Spanish on the City of Yakima website front page in the %Points of Interest+section (<http://bit.ly/1JQCyhf>). Because participation in the online survey will be available to anyone, its results will not be scientifically valid, but will still provide information the City can use as part of its community court evaluation. Responses to the online survey must also be received no later than Friday, May 22nd.

The first community court in the U.S., Midtown Community Court, was established in New York City in 1993. Several dozen other community courts inspired by the Midtown model are in operation or are being planned in other parts of the country.

Community courts take many forms, but the primary concept they all operate under is to target low-level crimes that tend to affect the quality of life in a given area of a city. As opposed to simply prosecuting offenders, community courts use their inherent legal leverage to link offenders with social services, such as drug treatment, health care, education, etc., to help them address their underlying problems. By doing so, community courts attempt to stem the chronic offending that demoralizes law-abiding residents and negatively affects quality of life.

The City has been working with the Center for Court Innovation, a New York-based non-profit organization, to research the potential for establishing a community court in Yakima. In partnership with the New York State Unified Court System and New York City, the Center for Court Innovation helped launch Midtown Community Court in 1993. Today, the non-profit helps to create and operate demonstration projects, provides expert advice to communities throughout the U.S. and internationally, and conducts research on community prosecution.

The City began investigating the potential for establishing a community court in Yakima earlier this year. Based on the results of the survey, the City may further evaluate the concept using methods including interviews with stakeholders, focus groups, and community forums.

The City hopes to determine whether or not it will pursue the establishment of a community court in Yakima later this year.