

Benton County

# **BUILDING A JUSTICE SYSTEM FOR THE FUTURE**

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**PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN:  
PRE-DESIGN PHASE 2021**

*Accountability and treatment to  
transform lives, ensure safety and  
strengthen community*



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## OVERVIEW

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In Benton County, **antiquated and overcrowded buildings** built many decades ago are compromising the justice system. Here are examples of what's broken:

- The 1888 Historic Courthouse is **too small, has safety and security issues**, and cannot be expanded to support modern court functions.
- Built in 1976, the **Benton County jail is outdated and inadequate**. With only 40 beds, the County rents space elsewhere, sending local tax dollars away from our community.
- **Offenders are routinely released** into the community because the jail is full; our “revolving-door” justice system is often unable to hold criminals accountable.
- **People experiencing addiction** and mental illness struggle to find help because our system often lacks the facilities and services to treat them.

**Leaders are listening** — the community wants a **modern justice system** that builds trust, responds to crises, provides safety, holds offenders accountable, and helps people rejoin the community as productive neighbors, parents, and family members. Many people working together over several years have created this **proposal for new facilities**:

- **Crisis Center:** A treatment-centered alternative to jail or the emergency room, this building incorporates addiction, mental health and support services. *Treatment addresses underlying needs.*
- **Sheriff and Emergency Operations:** This modern building will incorporate safety features and technology to resolve problems, both in crisis and everyday situations. *Modern facilities help first responders save lives.*
- **Courthouse:** An accessible, safe, and secure building designed for the 21st century. The Historic Courthouse will be preserved for future community use. *All community members need fair and equitable access.*
- **Corrections Facility:** With modern safety features and rehabilitation programs, this facility will produce real outcomes and serve the County for at least 40 years. *Victims and the public know dangerous offenders will be kept off the street.*

This program is the next step in inviting the public to join the conversation about how to build an equitable, effective, and safe justice system for all Benton County residents.

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## JUSTICE SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM VISION STATEMENT

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**The residents of Benton County** require an effective, efficient, and equitable criminal justice system that maintains public safety and holds people accountable, while providing treatment opportunities that address underlying factors contributing to criminal behavior. The program will provide:

- Rapid and effective response to crimes as they occur
- Efficient processing and adjudication of cases through the system
- Incarceration based on potential risk to the community
- Treatment, programs, and case management intended to reduce criminal behavior.

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## PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

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The public involvement goals for this phase of the program are to:

- **Raise awareness** about the County's approach to embracing prevention, treatment and accountability in the justice system.
- **Gather perspectives** about the Justice System Improvement Program from both involved community members and the general public, including people who usually don't attend public meetings.
- **Listen carefully to people** regarding program purpose, goals, and questions.
- **Hear from a broad and diverse group** of people; consider all input, not just the loudest opinions.
- **Thoughtfully consider community input**, respond in a timely way, and explain the reasoning behind program decisions.
- **Build community trust** as a strong foundation for the program.
- **Determine** the elements of a bond measure for the Justice System Improvement Program.

The program plans to meet these goals through the following activities:

- **Conduct outreach** that connects with as many people as possible from a range of backgrounds and areas of the County. Connect with marginalized communities such as residents with low incomes, young adults, communities of color, and people with disabilities. Methods include online open houses, small groups, virtual large meetings, outreach at public events and venues, and speaking engagements.
- Utilize both **traditional and new methods of communication** to reach the Benton County audience, including but not limited to: media in local news outlets, e-newsletters, and social media.

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## LEADERSHIP AND DECISION MAKING

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The program is guided by [Benton County Commissioners](#) and sponsored by the Benton County Administrator and the Benton County Sheriff. The Operations Core Team provides oversight and guidance. The [Technical Advisory Committee and Community Advisory Committee](#) advise the Operations Core Team.

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## KEY PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

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### CONCEPT OPTIONS (JUNE – SEPTEMBER 2021)

The Operations Core Team will introduce a set of concepts for the public to consider. Significant public questions will focus on the locations/configurations of service buildings and general opinions about the Justice System Improvement Program.

- **Small groups and speaking engagements** will create opportunities for more in-depth conversations with groups and organizations regarding specific information on the siting and function of the facilities.
- An **online questionnaire and event/person-on-the street outreach** will connect with people in 10 minutes or less. After a brief overview of the program, we will ask questions about key elements and values.
- Outreach will culminate in a large **Virtual Event #1**. The agenda for the webinar-style event will include a presentation, discussion, and polling questions.

### REFINED CONCEPT (OCTOBER – NOVEMBER 2021)

The Operations Team will describe how they used the input from the Concept Options phase to craft a single draft Refined Concept. The program will again use an online questionnaire, polling, speaking engagements, and Virtual Event #2 to gather input on the Refined Concept.

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## NEXT STEPS

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Once the location and configuration of buildings is decided, then the Operations Core Team will develop a final budget and make a plan for funding. The funding plan will help determine the elements of a bond measure for the Justice System Improvement Program.

For more information on the Justice System Improvement Program visit <https://www.co.benton.or.us/criminaljustice>.