

Criminal Justice Reform Moves Forward in Oklahoma County

In response to the growing concerns about Oklahoma County's jail facility, the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber and several community members recently created a task force to evaluate Oklahoma County's criminal justice system and make recommendations to reduce incarceration, increase efficiencies and improve safety. The work of the task force is in preparation for future investments in the county's jail and other related facilities. The task force is chaired by Clay Bennett, chairman of the Oklahoma City Thunder and president of Dorchester Capital.

Oklahoma County's jail, which opened in 1990, was constructed to ease overcrowding. But with more than 2,500 inmates currently in a 1,250 capacity facility, the state of the jail makes a point and raises an important question: Building a larger jail does not necessarily stop overcrowding. How can Oklahoma County ease the overcrowding of its jail while holistically addressing the root causes of incarceration?

To answer that question, the Chamber contracted with the VERA Institute of Justice to analyze ways that reforms in Oklahoma County might help reduce incarceration, increase efficiencies and better serve the community. VERA spent three days in Oklahoma City late last year to conduct their initial research of Oklahoma County's criminal justice system. Its key findings indicated that there are multiple drivers of jail population growth that could be addressed



The Chamber and other members of its criminal justice reform task force contracted with the VERA Institute of Justice to analyze the impact that reforms could have on Oklahoma County, including the overcrowding currently seen at the Oklahoma County Jail.

locally with long-term impacts on jail population, including:

- The number of low-level, misdemeanor or traffic-related, nonviolent defendants in jail pre-trial.
- Case processing delays.
- The outsized role that money plays in the pre-trial phase (non-monetary pretrial release and the bail bond process).

VERA also found that about 80 percent of the people in Oklahoma County's jail have not been convicted of a crime – they are awaiting trial. Of that number, more than 70 percent are charged with a misdemeanor offense. In addition, more than 400 people in jail, on average, have significant mental health issues that are going untreated.

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It is vital that we become more intentional about our criminal justice system.

-Roy H. Williams, CCE

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Learn More about RIVERSPORT Rapids

Oklahoma City's new \$45 million MAPS 3 whitewater rafting and kayaking center – RIVERSPORT Rapids – celebrated its grand opening in May and is a game changer for Oklahoma City. Read more from Elizabeth Laurent, senior director of sales and marketing for the OKC Boathouse Foundation, on all that RIVERSPORT Rapids will have to offer.

Tell us more about the course. What types of athletic and recreational activities does it offer?

Laurent: RIVERSPORT Rapids is one of only three man-made whitewater centers in the U.S., so it is one more thing in our growing list of unique features that sets Oklahoma City apart from other cities. We offer incredible recreational rafting, kayaking and tubing experiences, and people will also see elite athletes from around the world training and competing on the slalom channel. Even if you're not ready to get on the water, you'll enjoy watching all the action from the new restaurant overlooking the entire center.



RIVERSPORT Rapids is one of three man-made whitewater centers in the U.S. and the only place offering both whitewater and flatwater canoe/kayak training.

Who can use the center? What kinds of opportunities does it offer for middle and high school students? College athletes? Elite athletes? Average residents?

Laurent: People may be surprised at how much excitement RIVERSPORT Rapids brings to our city. Rafting is accessible to just about anyone. You don't need any previous experience and our guides will make it fun for everyone. We'll also offer tubing with the rapids slowed down a bit, and we have "floating films" where people can watch movies from a tube in the lower pond.

We see people getting into the rafting and tubing, and also into the music and other activities – like 5k runs – that will be hosted. Our "all access" passes include whitewater plus all of the Adventures in the Boathouse District such as the SandRidge Sky Trail, zip lines, pump track, climbing walls and more. It is a great vacation or "staycation" destination.

Metro-area residents will receive a discount on day passes Monday through Thursday as a thank-you for supporting the one-cent tax that made this and other MAPS projects possible.

Even people who don't want to get on the water will enjoy coming to RIVERSPORT Rapids. There's no charge to come in, so you can walk around and just enjoy watching other people raft and kayak. We'll also have a restaurant and retail store.

Youth who are interested in slalom have the opportunity to train on the course and compete regionally and nationally. We fully expect to have young athletes start their paddling careers here and in the coming years to be competing at an Olympic level.

We take reservations for field trips and end-of-year experiences that include a behind-the-scenes tour. We can also do field trips that focus on science and technology.

College students are big recreational rafters and RIVERSPORT Rapids offers great group experiences for clubs and sororities/fraternities. We're also looking for college students to work as raft guides and in other areas.

On the elite side, athletes from across the country travel to Oklahoma City to train at RIVERSPORT Rapids and in May, we hosted the U.S. Olympic Team Trials-Canoe/Kayak Slalom.

When planning the design of the course, what cities/facilities did you look to for inspiration?

Laurent: Visits were made to whitewater centers in Germany, London, Charlotte, N.C., and Maryland to identify the best elements of each venue and learn from their experiences. RIVERSPORT Rapids was designed by the same team – Scott Shipley and S2O – that developed the U.K.'s Lee Valley White Water Centre for the 2012 London Olympics. The U.S. National Whitewater Center in Charlotte was also built by the same team.

Like Charlotte, we combined whitewater rafting and kayaking with other outdoor adventure activities. Charlotte's center has been highly successful even though it is located about 20 minutes outside the city. Oklahoma City's whitewater center is within walking distance of Bricktown and is located at the crossroads of the nation at Interstates 35 and 40.



As home to USA Canoe/Kayak, the governing body for the sport in the U.S., the course will attract new races to Oklahoma City, RIVERSPORT Rapids will also be within walking distance of downtown hotels and restaurants.

How does this facility set Oklahoma City apart as a paddlesports facility?

Laurent: Oklahoma City has one of the best – if not the best – whitewater courses in the world. We are also the only place in the world offering world-class whitewater and flatwater canoe/kayak in the same place. We bring paddle sports to a broader range of people than ever before.

As home to USA Canoe/Kayak, the governing body for the sport in the U.S., the course will attract new races to OKC, and we know athletes are already planning to move here to train. The International Canoe Federation has also contacted us about the possibility of hosting international events.

But more than that, RIVERSPORT Rapids makes it possible for people in Oklahoma City to make whitewater kayaking and rafting a part of their everyday lives. Just like people who live near the mountains go snow skiing, we add a whitewater facility as another place to get outside and be active.

And what does the facility do for Oklahoma City as a whole?

Laurent: RIVERSPORT Rapids sets Oklahoma City apart from other cities across the U.S. We are the only place in the country – maybe in the world – to offer experiences like this within walking distance of downtown hotels and restaurants. It is expected to bring in significant tourism dollars as the whitewater center attracts vacationers across the region. We also have swiftwater rescue training which will attract first responders from across the U.S. All of this adds up to new revenue for hotels, restaurants and merchants in the city.

Beyond tourism, whitewater brings a whole new set of opportunities for metro area residents – it really will be a lifestyle change for many people. We will have corporate rafting teams, so at work you may find yourself signing up for the spring whitewater raft race. Kids can come to whitewater camp, and if they like it, join the whitewater kayaking team. College kids will learn to be raft guides and we'll have a whole range of people coming down for music events and runs. Just as the river has become a center of community activity, we see the whitewater center taking it to the next level.

What kind of buzz or excitement are you hearing from outside of Oklahoma City?

Laurent: We've already had a lot of interest from paddlers across the country eager to try the new course, and as I mentioned earlier, the ICF is interested in having international events here. We've also had significant interest from the US Olympic Committee. This is a great asset for our whitewater paddlers and just adds to Oklahoma City's value as a US Olympic and Paralympic Training Site.

What questions are people asking about the facility?

Laurent: People want to know how long the course is (1,300 feet for the competitive channel; 1,600 feet for the recreational channel), how much water it takes to fill it up (8 million gallons), and where will the water come from (a combination of ground water and city water. It doesn't have river water in it). They also want to know how long the rafting experience will be (about 90 minutes) and if we think they can do it (yes!).

Experience RIVERSPORT Rapids for yourself. Learn more at www.riversportokc.org

Brookings Study on Innovation Focuses on Oklahoma City

The Brookings Institution and Project for Public Spaces are in the middle of an 18-month study of Oklahoma City's emerging innovation district, an area encompassing the Oklahoma Health Center and Automobile Alley. This work, focusing on the district's economic strengths' and quality of place, is part of the Bass Initiative on Innovation and Placemaking.

The study will examine the rising interplay between innovation, quality places and economic growth by studying innovation districts in Oklahoma City and Philadelphia. The work aims to catalyze a new approach to city-building that integrates the reinforcing benefits of vibrant public spaces, innovative urban economies and inclusive growth.

"Oklahoma City is an innovative community, and our partnership with Brookings and PPS will allow us to continue to realize and capitalize on our assets," said Roy H. Williams, CCE, president and CEO of the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber.

"The continued growth of Oklahoma City's medical center and the surrounding areas will bolster the economy and strengthen the bonds of collaboration. And equally important, the lessons learned during this project will be applicable to other areas of Oklahoma City."

The Bass Initiative will build on Brookings's research on innovation districts — dense, amenity-rich enclaves that are typically anchored by R&D institutions and facilitate new ideas and businesses — and PPS's long track record in placemaking, a participatory community process to develop quality public spaces by capitalizing on a community's assets and potential. It will encourage mixed-use entrepreneurial and cultural districts through research, network building, and on-the-ground projects, including studies of the innovation ecosystems.

"Oklahoma City has systems in place that support an innovating community, but there is room for growth," said Tom R. Gray, III,

president of the Presbyterian Health Foundation. "As the world continues to evolve, we have to evolve with it. Working with these entities will help us understand how to continue our forward momentum."

The initiative's Oklahoma City study will use quantitative analysis of both local and national data as well as stakeholder interviews to

audit the innovative industries and networking and physical assets in the burgeoning innovation district. During the study, Brookings and PPS are working with community leaders to create a unified vision and strategy for the district's future growth in order to bolster the area as a key driver of the regional economy.

"As the epicenter of research, health care, education and technology in the state of Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Health Center Foundation recognizes this district's potential for growth," said David Harlow, chairman of the Oklahoma Health Center Foundation board of directors. "We believe that engaged partnerships and creative problem solving are the keys to

increasing our innovation. Brookings and PPS bring a perspective to the table that will help us get to where we need to be."

The Oklahoma City study is funded through a partnership of community organizations including the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber, the Presbyterian Health Foundation, the Oklahoma Health Center Foundation, the City of Oklahoma City and the Alliance for Economic Development of Oklahoma City. Additional community supporters include the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation and the University of Oklahoma.

"We have the potential to enhance this area to attract more innovation, more investment and more qualified workers," said Cathy O'Connor, president and CEO of The Alliance for Economic Development of Oklahoma City. "Using these resources in this district and across the city will impact our ability to attract new companies and employees to all areas of Oklahoma City."



The work of Brookings and PPS aims to catalyze a new approach to city building, one that reinforces the benefits of vibrant public spaces and inclusive growth.

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Bennett reinforced the importance of this process to addressing the concerns of Oklahoma County’s criminal justice system. “We know we cannot address all of these issues all at once, but we must take a meaningful step as it relates to facilities, reforms and programs. We must conduct a principled, transparent and well-informed process, which, like in all of our recent success, leaves self-interest and politics at the door.”

The task force has unanimously agreed to partner with VERA for a second, more-intensive phase of research. The second phase of their work in Oklahoma City will be a seven-to-nine month detailed data analysis of information from law enforcement, the jail, the courts and service providers. The findings from this information will help the task force develop detailed recommendations for the reduction of Oklahoma County’s incarceration rate and the improvement of its system.

“As a community, we must decide who we want in our county jail and not let disconnected silos drive the size and scope of our criminal justice system,” said Roy H. Williams, CCE, president and CEO of the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber.

“The coordinated efforts of this task force hope to create an oversight process that does not currently exist in our community. Our time and effort will lead to a system that is effective and sustainable. It is vital that we become more intentional about our criminal justice system.”

In addition local efforts to improve the criminal justice system, reforms on a statewide level have also taken place this year. In late February, Gov. Mary Fallin signed an executive order that eliminates questions

about prior felony convictions from job applications at state agencies. Gov. Fallin also signed four criminal justice measures into law in late April. The measures, all authored by Rep. Pam Peterson, R-Tulsa, are intended to curb the growing incarceration rate while saving significant amounts of money. A coalition of community leaders and experts from across Oklahoma launched Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform. The group recently collected more than 220,000 signatures for a ballot initiative

that would reclassify low-level offenses like drug possession as misdemeanors instead of felonies and use those cost savings to invest in rehabilitation programs for drug addiction and mental health conditions.



We must take a meaningful step as it relates to facilities, reforms and programs. We must conduct a principled, transparent and well-informed process, which, like in all of our recent success, leaves self-interest and politics at the door.

-Clay Bennett, chair of the criminal justice task force



How does VERA approach criminal justice reform?

VERA’s mission is to build and improve justice systems that ensure fairness, promote safety and strengthen communities, and they work in communities across the globe. They do so by partnering with community organizations and government officials to conduct research and analysis, provide technical assistance and implementing demonstration projects. VERA’s projects are active in 48 states and 10 countries worldwide.

How have other communities addressed criminal justice reform?

Communities across the country are undergoing similar criminal justice reform efforts, and with significant results.

Albuquerque, N.M.: Albuquerque’s growing incarceration rate and overcrowded jail was very similar to the situation in Oklahoma County. By implementing a series of reforms, the city reduced its jail population by 40 percent in just two years. A similar reduction in

Oklahoma County would remove 1,000 people currently in jail, saving \$47,000 per day and more than \$17 million each year.

New Orleans, La.: Before Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans had an incarceration rate that was more than five times the national average and a jail population of 6,300. After the storm, efforts were initiated to build a smaller jail to house 5,800, but wholesale policy reforms allowed the city to build a jail with capacity for 1,438 beds – decreasing its jail population by more than 75 percent compared to pre-Katrina numbers.

OKCPS Academies Prepare Students to Succeed

On a recent overcast day at Capitol Hill High School in south Oklahoma City, a group of students gathered outside to fly the remote-controlled drones they had built in class the day before. On the first attempt, a propeller came off and the drone dropped from the sky, but later attempts were more successful as the drones took off.

For the students, landing the drones gently turned out to be the most difficult part of the class that day, as some of them flew high into the air and sailed away.

In some ways, that's the point: The Academy of Engineering that has brought these students together for the drone-flying experiment is designed to help them find flight and soar – with new ideas, skills and long-term goals that include college.

"I was lucky they enrolled me in the class. ... I want to stay with this," said ninth grader Heriboto Morales, who is interested in graphic design. "It involves a lot of math."

In return, these students will enter the workforce better prepared in their chosen fields.

Capitol Hill's Academy of Engineering is one of nine academies throughout the Oklahoma City Public School District offering specialized learning for students in certain areas, including fine arts, finance, health sciences, hospitality and tourism, law and public safety and more. These academies are affiliated with the National Academy Foundation (NAF), which notes on its website that during the 2014-15 school year, nearly 82,000 students attended 667 NAF academies in 38 states, including Washington, D.C., and the U.S. Virgin Islands. And of those, NAF academies reported, 97 percent of seniors graduated from high school, and 93 percent of the graduates planned to go to college.

"We are a school within a school so we have a lot of pride in our program," said Mike Jennings, career academy site manager at Capitol Hill, referring to the engineering academy.

These academies help the students focus on certain fields, and they invite participation from local companies and individuals who can

serve on advisory boards, donate equipment and other resources or offer internships for the students.

Instructors and volunteers at several academies noted their students are motivated to learn, building confidence and setting goals. Many are seeing increases in test scores among academy students.



Capitol Hill's Academy of Engineering is one of nine academies throughout the Oklahoma City Public School District offering specialized learning opportunities for students.

In the freshman-level introduction to engineering design class, Capitol Hill academy teacher Jonathan Inhoff said the students not only are building drones, but they'll also design items on a professional CAD program that they can print on a 3D printer.

In another classroom on the same campus, teacher Erika Reyes with the Fine Arts Academy leads a group of students through dance moves and exercise. The academy students perform at events like the State Fair and the Fiestas de Las Americas. In addition to dance, this academy also offers music and drama and recently completed its first year at Capitol Hill.

"I hope to get our 75 freshman and sophomores on the right path. I hope to inspire future academy students in middle schools," Reyes said. "We are the only Academy of the Arts on the south side of Oklahoma City."

On another recent afternoon at Southeast High School, students in the Academy of Information Technology are filming a video featuring business leaders eager to support and promote the academy. After it's over, SandRidge Energy volunteers led a discussion about video production and real-life applications for the students' interests.

These academies "are full of students that want to achieve and want to find a place in this city and in the business community where they can accomplish their goals," said Bank of America Merrill Lynch Market President Tony Shinn in the video. "The students in high schools in these career academies are some of the best and brightest, and we need to provide all the resources and support we can to help them achieve their goals."

MAPS 3 Modern Streetcar Routes, Vendor Approved By City Council

Progress on the MAPS 3 Modern Streetcar, one of eight projects funded by the one-cent sales tax approved by voters in December 2009, continues. In February, the Oklahoma City Council approved modifications to the MAPS 3 Modern Streetcar route. The change creates an additional dedicated route to better connect the MAPS 3 Downtown Public Park and the proposed MAPS 3 Downtown Convention Center to Bricktown.

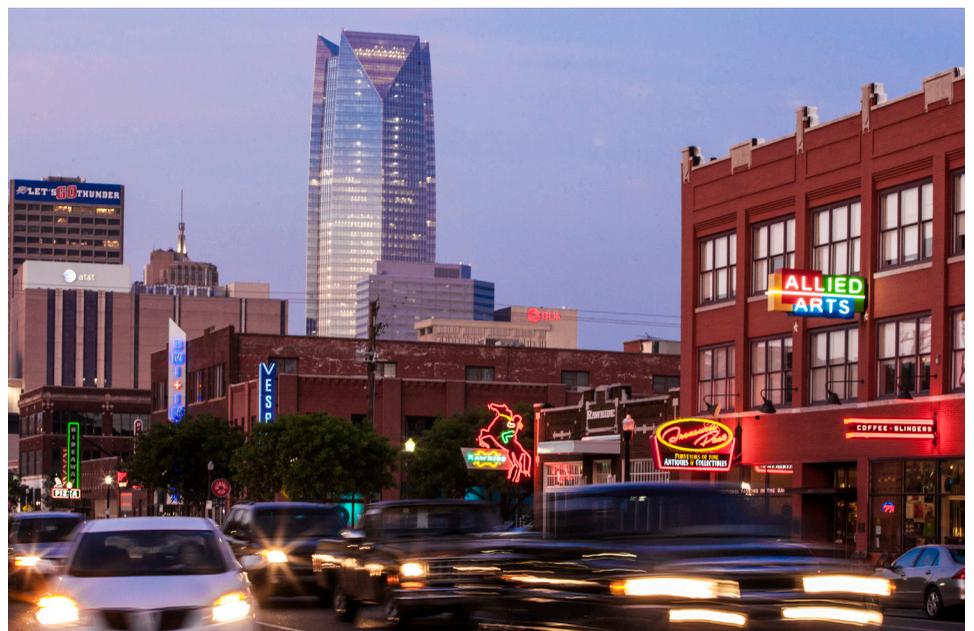
Route 1 is the original route of 4.86 miles, but adds a new section to connect the Downtown Transit Center, Automobile Alley, future intermodal hub (Santa Fe Station), Midtown, St. Anthony Hospital, Bricktown, the future MAPS 3 Convention Center and the future MAPS 3 Park. Route 2 is a 2.04-mile route that exclusively serves Bricktown, the future MAPS 3 and current Cox Convention centers, the Myriad Botanical Gardens and the future MAPS 3 Park. It was created to better accommodate the location of the future MAPS 3 Convention Center.

Criteria used to develop the route included connecting key destinations, integrating with the existing transportation network, maximizing economic development potential, optimizing system operation, the potential for expansion, technical considerations and cost projections. The revised routes will offer flexibility for frequent service to the convention center and increased ability to handle crowds for large events downtown. The approved routes also include areas for possible future expansion, including into the Oklahoma Health Center to the northeast, on North Classen Drive to the northwest and south of the future MAPS 3 Park along South Walker Avenue.

Construction on the rails, which will be level with the street, is expected to begin in the fall of 2016. The City also finalized its contract with streetcar manufacturer Brookville Equipment Corporation to construct six modern streetcars for the system. The American-based Brookville has previously built two similar streetcars for the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) system and is currently constructing two more. Brookville also is under contract with the city of Detroit to build six streetcars. Under the terms of the pending contract, the first streetcar is scheduled to arrive by October 2017.



Work on the MAPS 3 Modern Streetcar, pictured in a rendering of its potential design above, continues to progress after City Council approved modifications of its route and a contract with streetcar manufacturer Brookville Equipment Corporation.



Route 1 of the MAPS 3 Modern Streetcar now includes a new section that will connect the Downtown Transit Center, Automobile Alley, the future intermodal hub at Santa Fe Station, Midtown, St. Anthony Hospital, Bricktown, the future MAPS 3 Convention Center and the future MAPS 3 Park. Route 2 will exclusively serve Bricktown, the future MAPS 3 and current Cox Convention Centers, the Myriad Botanical Gardens and the future MAPS 3 Park.



123 Park Ave. | Oklahoma City, OK 73102
www.okcchamber.com

EDITORIAL STAFF
Cynthia Reid, Kaylee Terracina

DESIGNER
Traci Hayes

PRESORTED STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE
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