

**MOORPARK CITY COUNCIL
AGENDA REPORT**

TO: Honorable City Council

FROM: Steven Kueny, City Manager *SK*

Prepared by: Jennifer Mellon, Administrative Services Manager *JM*

DATE: October 27, 2011 (CC Meeting of November 2, 2011)

SUBJECT: Consider Proposed Reassignment of Superior Court Civil Cases from the East County Courthouse in Simi Valley to the Ventura County Hall of Justice

BACKGROUND

The Superior Court of the County of Ventura (Superior Court) has posted a Public Notice, attached, to solicit comments on a proposal to reassign its two East County Courthouse Civil Law Judges and all related civil clerk's office operations at the Simi Valley location, except unlawful detainers, to its main courthouse located at the Hall of Justice in Ventura effective in late January or early February 2012. The East County Courthouse would continue to hear and accept filings for Family Law, Unlawful Detainers, and Traffic matters, as well as criminal cases. The deadline for submitting comments on the proposed reassignment is November 8, 2011.

The Superior Court has indicated that the proposed changes are due to a lack of state funding for the California Court System and that the Superior Court is facing a \$5.8 million deficit for Fiscal Year 2011-12 which is projected to increase to \$9.3 million for the Fiscal Year beginning July 2012. The funding reduction has necessitated hiring freezes, mandatory furloughs, and layoffs such that staffing at the East County Courthouse has been reduced to the extent that the civil clerk's office is unable to process work in a timely manner. As a temporary solution, the court is transporting all initiating civil case filings to the Hall of Justice in Ventura for processing and then transporting the files back to the East County Courthouse in Simi Valley. The Superior Court states that centralizing the civil cases to Ventura would allow for greater efficiencies and regrets that inadequate funding is reducing access to the courts for citizens of this County.

DISCUSSION

While the decision to consolidate may generate efficiencies, the Superior Court has not considered the impact on east county residents and Cities. Requiring residents and businesses within Moorpark who are in need of Civil Court services to travel to the far west

end of the County is inappropriate. Staff appreciates the financial hardship that the Superior Court faces, but there are other alternatives that should be examined and considered before establishing a policy that eliminates reasonable and convenient access to civil court services for Moorpark residents and businesses.

This change in service will also impact law enforcement activities in Moorpark at a time when the level of service is already beginning to be impacted by the State's prison realignment program. Moorpark Police Officers need to maximize their time spent patrolling and servicing the City within the city limits. Requiring Moorpark Police Officers to travel to and from the Hall of Justice whenever they are required to appear on civil matters will be costly and impact the effectiveness of local police activities.

On October 20, 2011, the Mayors and City Managers of Moorpark, Simi Valley, and Thousand Oaks met to initiate discussion regarding the Superior Courts' proposal. On October 27, 2011, the three City Managers met with the Court Executive Officer and Assistant Court Executive Officer to learn more about the proposal and related court finances as well as to discuss alternatives the Superior Court might consider while continuing to hear and accept filings for civil cases at the East County Courthouse. At the conclusion of the meeting it was agreed that another meeting would be held in approximately two weeks to continue to discuss alternatives and a possible delay in implementing the proposed reassignment.

FISCAL IMPACT

The potential fiscal impact to the City would be related to Police, Attorney, and City Staff travel time.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Authorize the Mayor to sign a letter in opposition of the proposed reassignment.

Attachment: Public Notice of Request for Public Input

PUBLIC NOTICE OF REQUEST FOR PUBLIC INPUT

(California Rules of Court, rule 10.620)

Superior Court of California, County of Ventura

RESPONDING TO REDUCTION IN WORKFORCE CAUSED BY THE FISCAL CRISIS THE VENTURA SUPERIOR COURT IS CONSIDERING REASSIGNING THE EAST COUNTY CIVIL LAW JUDGES AND CLERK'S OPERATIONS TO THE HALL OF JUSTICE

The Ventura Superior Court is considering reassigning its two East County Civil Law Judges (Courtrooms S3 and S5) and all related civil clerk's office operations at that location, except unlawful detainers, to its main courthouse located at the Hall of Justice, 800 South Victoria Avenue, Ventura, California in late January, early February 2012. The proposed changes are due to the significant reduction in funding for the California court system. The Ventura Superior Court is facing a \$5.8 million dollar deficit for fiscal year beginning July 2011, which is projected to increase to \$9.3 million for fiscal year beginning July 2012.

Court employees currently working at the East County Courthouse civil clerk's office are responsible for processing all civil, family and small claims matters filed at that location. Due to hiring freezes, mandatory furloughs and layoffs, staffing at the East County Courthouse has been so reduced that the clerk's office is unable to process the work in all these areas in a timely manner. Given the urgency of the problem, as a temporary solution, the court is transporting all initiating civil case filings to the Hall of Justice in Ventura for processing and then transporting the files back to the East County Courthouse in Simi Valley. Moving the civil courtrooms will allow for greater efficiencies by processing all civil cases in one court location. While the court regrets that inadequate funding is reducing access to the courts for the citizens of this county, it cannot maintain the current level of services.

The East County Courthouse would continue to hear and accept filings for Family Law Small Claims, Unlawful Detainers and Traffic matters.

The public is invited to comment on this proposal, either by mail or e-mail, by November 8, 2011. Please direct your response to:

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