



NEWS

MONTGOMERY COUNTY OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS
COURT HOUSE, NORRISTOWN, PA., BOX 311, 19404-0311

Frank X. Custer, Communications Director

Jessica Willingham, Communications Assistant

PHONE (610) 278-3061 FAX (610) 278-5943

COMMISSIONERS: JOSH SHAPIRO, *Chair*

VALERIE A. ARKOOSH, MD, MPH, *Vice Chair*

BRUCE L. CASTOR, JR., *Commissioner*



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 31, 2015

Montco Shows Off Redesigned Juvenile Court Facilities and Totally Refurbished Juvenile Probation Department Digs

Port Indian, PA (July 31, 2015) – The working conditions in one building “bordered on inhumane,” according to a Montgomery County President Judge. The other building, the county’s Youth Center, housed an excellent shelter and detention unit, but also featured a juvenile court facility that had troubling security issues that put defendants and victims and their families in close proximity.

The buildings in question are on the idyllic Port Indian campus that holds Montgomery County’s Youth Center and Juvenile Probation offices (JPO). On Friday, the county commissioners, along with county judges, row officers, and other officials took the wraps off \$3.2 million in renovations to the two buildings.

The two projects, which got underway last October, are examples of different county operating procedures that have shifted to fixing problems rather than taking a Band-Aid approach, and making sure that capital dollars are spent on county infrastructure first, according to Josh Shapiro, chair of the county commissioners.

“When this administration took office in 2012, we made a conscious decision to spend county taxpayer dollars on county infrastructure – our buildings, our roads, our bridges, and our parks, trails, and historic sites,” Shapiro said. “In 2011, the county was spending 53 cents of every capital dollar on county assets, and today that number is 95 cents per dollar.”

Shapiro pointed out that the “inhumane conditions” in the Juvenile Probation Department referenced by the late President Judge Richard Hodgson in 2011, and reiterated to the new administration by current President Judge William J. Furber, Jr., didn’t happen overnight, and the security

shortcomings in the court facilities existed since the facility was built. “When our staff toured the Juvenile Probation facilities, they were appalled.”

“We simply could not have our employees working in the kind of conditions that existed in Juvenile Probation, and the situation at the Youth Center that put defendants and victims of crime near each other was untenable,” said Commissioner Val Arkoosh. “What we are unveiling today is a major step forward in both buildings.”

“The facilities we show off today are a vast improvement over what existed,” said Commissioner Bruce L. Castor, Jr. “The improvement at Juvenile Probation is amazing, but as a former prosecutor I am also impressed by the changes in the court facilities at the Youth Center. It is better for defendants and the victims. It gives attorneys privacy to confer with clients, and the security measures are much improved.”

Prior to the recent redesign of the court-related facilities at the Youth Center, defendants and their families had to share a waiting room. Now there are separate rooms with consultation rooms for attorneys and their clients. In addition, there is a new holding room, upgraded restroom facilities, and more secure entrances and exits. There were also upgrades to the HVAC and the electrical systems.

Another major improvement that will improve efficiency is the creation of new office space for the juvenile court files handled by the Clerk of Courts office. Previously, the records were kept several hundred yards away at the Juvenile Probation offices, but now they will be just steps away from the courtroom and judge’s chambers.

While the court facilities at the Youth Center presented logistical problems, the Juvenile Probation building presented a totally different set of challenges. In an August 2011 article in *The Intelligencer*, then President Judge Hodgson said the working conditions “bordered on the inhumane,” and said, “no county employee should have to work in this environment.”

“After we took office, the commissioners and several senior staff members toured the facility, and we could not believe the condition of the building and the working conditions,” Shapiro said.

What Shapiro and Hodgson were referring to was a deteriorating building built in 1933 with two additions added in the 1960s that featured peeling paint, falling ceilings, a failing air conditioning system, and files stored in hallways and virtually every nook and cranny in the building, including the boiler room. Hodgson referred to “decades old carpeting” that was “an accident waiting to happen” in his 2011 comments in *The Intelligencer*.

Perhaps the biggest change at JPO involves the physical layout. The building was originally the county's youth detention center, and probation officers were forced to work two to an office that was originally a small holding cell for those youths who were detained there. The project blew out many of those walls creating large, airy open work spaces well lit through the all new windows put into the building. Bathroom facilities were expanded and modernized, and small kitchens and conference rooms were located throughout the three-story building. The new layout creates "hoteling" office space for the mobile staff that spends much of its time outside the office. The layout maximizes space usage, and allowed for the creation of the other amenities such as the conference rooms, kitchens, and enhanced restroom facilities.