

Courthouse security criticized

(KLZA)--The Richardson County Commissioners had a full house for a discussion on courthouse security Tuesday morning.

Gayle Swisegood who served 20 years as a Commissioner told current Board members he thinks the courthouse security that was put in place in July is a mistake.

Swisegood said the way the system is set up is flawed, with only one of the five entrances guarded, making it easy for someone wanting to cause trouble to do so.

Swisegood noted that most of the shootings we hear about in public buildings are by disgruntled workers. He said the people most inconvenienced by the security is the people the courthouse offices are designed to serve.

Bob Witt with the Taking Back Our Communities group said he would rather see deputies out on patrol than sitting in the courthouse.

Jerry McKim posed a question to the Commissioners about making the south entrance the public entrance when a street level entrance already existed on the north side of the building. Third District Commissioner Terry Frank said the north entrance did not meet ADA standards.

Swisegood said that he hoped member of their public would express their thoughts on the courthouse security to the Commissioners.

Richardson County Clerk of the District Court Pam Scott told MSCnews later that while District Judge Julie Smith requested security for the courtrooms when court is in session, the elected officials were concerned about general security when the Sheriff's Office moved from the Courthouse to the new law enforcement center.

Scott said during meetings concerning courthouse security with the Commissioners, when the Sheriff's Office was moved to its new location, the elected officials felt that while something may not happen this week, or in a month or even year, they did not want to be the group that had said "we don't need security" when something did happen at some point in the future.

Sickel said the Courthouse Security will be reviewed during the budget process that is currently underway. County Clerk Mary Eickhoff estimated the cost for a Deputy Sheriff to be at the Courthouse would be about \$60-thousand annually.

According to the activity report from Deputy Mike Dougherty, who fills the courthouse position, during the first 21 days the security was in place, the Courthouse averaged 155 visitors per day, a total of more than 3,200. During the same time period there were 732 violations, meaning items disallowed were attempted to be brought into the building.

Violations include weapons such as knives, guns, pepper spray or other chemicals as well as ammunition magazines for guns.

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