

Posted on Thu, Mar. 01, 2007

Drug Court gets green light

Program would keep nonviolent offenders out of jail

BY JERRY F. RUTLEDGE
Staff Writer

gets green light

A new program which would launch alternative sentencing in Russell County courts, using methods other than incarceration to resolve nonviolent criminal cases, gained the blessing of the Russell County Commission on Tuesday.

The Community Corrections Program, which would include a Drug Court, would place offenders in a supervised program for one year. The programs would include treatment, if the offense is drug-related, and constant monitoring by the court system. Another criminal violation while the offender is in the program would result in incarceration.

The programs would hopefully result in less crowding in the Russell County Jail, said District Court Judge Michael Bellamy, a sponsor of the program. Russell County Sheriff Tommy Boswell and the Russell County District Attorney's Office are also on board in the alternative sentencing program.

"What I've seen over the years -- I've been a prosecutor, a defense attorney and now as a judge -- everybody (found guilty of a crime) should not necessarily go to jail," Bellamy said. "Those individuals who are not involved in serious criminal acts, who are using drugs and are addicted, I want to try treatment rather than incarceration. However, if they do not adhere to the treatment, then they would wind up being incarcerated."

Bellamy, Boswell and Chief Deputy District Attorney Buster Landreau presented the program to the commission Monday night during its work session. Bellamy came down from his courtroom to present a condensed version of the presentation to the commission during Tuesday's meeting.

A resolution was approved unanimously by the six sitting commissioners.

"If it saves one person, then it's worth it," Commissioner Gentry Lee said.

The Alabama Department of Corrections is working to expand community corrections programs across the state. Over the past two years, more than 2,000 offenders who would have entered the prison system have been diverted into established CCPs.

In other action, the commission is looking for other alternative methods -- this time to pay for fencing around the new youth baseball fields at the Russell County Recreation and Sports Complex in Seale.

Russell County Engineer Richard Gohde said the lowest of the four responsible bids for the fencing was \$103,283.46 by Nolan Fencing and Decking. The architects for the project -- Goodwin, Mills and Cawood Inc. -- had fixed the price at \$53,275. Gohde said the architect failed to multiply the estimate by two fields.

County Administrator LeAnn Horne, Commission Chairman J.D. Upshaw of District 7 and Vice Chairman Mervin Dudley of District 6 had informally discussed transferring some funds from other county projects -- a walking trail at Dixie Elementary and the demolition of an old school in Hatchechubbee -- to help pay for the fencing at the fields.

The commission passed the resolution accepting the bid.

© 2007 Ledger-Enquirer and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved.
<http://www.ledgerenquirer.com>