

Themes and Insights from Chief Judge Recruitment Stakeholder Interviews

Prepared for Council Review March 2020

Summary

Over the course of several weeks in January, February, and March, meetings were scheduled with Municipal Court Stakeholders in order to learn a variety of perspectives on the role of Chief Judge. Meetings were facilitated by Executive Recruiter Edward Williams of Baker Tilly, Catherine MacGowan, Human Resources Business Partner to City of Fort Collins Judicial Services and Teresa Roche, Chief Human Resources Officer.

It was explained to Stakeholders that the City Council is deeply interested in their perspectives on the role of the Court, current and future challenges and opportunities, and the experience and characteristics that would support a successful Chief Judge. The following themes represent what was shared in the various sessions.

- **Partnering and Collaboration:**

Stakeholders described a strong desire for the new Chief Judge to demonstrate a commitment to partnering closely and leveraging the co-responders, advocates, and offender experts across the community. Groups in the community such as CSU Conflict Resolution and Outreach Fort Collins are experts in the characteristics of the populations they serve. Several spoke about the “three-legged stool” that is strong by working together, including Policy (Council), Enforcement (Police & Special Commissioned Officers), and Accountability (Municipal Court).

- **Invest Time into Individual Offender Circumstances:**

Stakeholders expressed strong interest in a Chief Judge who is willing to take individual circumstances into consideration when determining the appropriate sentencing. With the shared goal of behavior change, not all offenders respond to the same type of sentencing.

- **Balance Accountability with Compassion:**

Stakeholders expressed strong interest in a compassionate Chief Judge who strikes an effective balance between leniency and consequences. Enforcement staff work hard to keep the community safe and a desirable place to live and back-up from the Court is essential for their roles.

- **Homelessness, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse:**

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of selecting a Chief Judge who has direct experience with homelessness and a community with comparable homeless, mental health, and substance abuse issues. Homelessness is the biggest challenge that the Court (and City) will face in coming years. Partnering with the new behavioral health treatment center being built in Larimer County will be an opportunity to deeply explore comprehensive options for offenders with mental health and substance abuse disorders. Specific comments mentioning:

- Municipal Court is at the forefront for the most vulnerable populations (homelessness, mental health, substance abuse.) These are complex problems to solve, and require holistic, behavioral changes.
- The makeup of the homeless community has changed. It is now mostly youth and young adult. They are travelling here for the marijuana and have no connection to the community at all. Marijuana and panhandling laws are primary causes of the issue. There are websites dedicated to sharing information about different cities to homeless transients; Fort Collins is at the top of the list for cities with the most resources and favorable laws.

- **Allow Time for the Chief Judge to engage in community learning and connection:**

Stakeholders understand that collaboration, partnering, listening, and understanding individual circumstances takes time. They expressed hope that the new Chief Judge would have the time to engage in these important activities.

- **Ensure Chief Judge understands the barriers and challenges of the undocumented population.**

- **Budget Allocations:**

Stakeholders have expressed a strong interest in ensuring a level of support is given to the Chief Judge for staffing, technology, security, and programming.

- **Team Leadership:**

The Municipal Court Staff team described an interest in the new Chief Judge being approachable, an advocate for the team and who can lead innovatively to provide solutions for the Court.