

Minutes  
Public Service and Trust Commission Committee on  
Expectations of the Public  
November 19, 2008

The Public Service and Trust Commission Committee on Expectations of the Public met Superior Court Operations, 225 Spring St., Wethersfield, CT in Room 204 on November 19, 2008.

Those in attendance: Hon. James Abrams (co-chair), Hon. Robert Beach (co-chair), Hon. Mark Gould, Atty. Charisse Hutton, Atty. Susan Kim, Atty. Stacey Manware, Atty. Peter McShane, Hon. Leslie Olear, Hon. Robin Pavia, Hon. Richard Rittenband, Mr. Frank Rizzo, Mr. Christopher Roy, Magistrate Jed Schulman, Hon. Kenneth Shluger, Hon. Mark Taylor, and Atty. Dawne Westbrook.

The meeting was called to order at 2:39 PM.

1. Welcome and Introduction of committee members – Judge Beach welcomed the members in attendance, thanked them for agreeing to help with this process, and asked them to introduce themselves.
2. Review of strategic planning and implementation process – Judge Beach provided an overview of the strategic planning process, which began about a year and a half ago when the Chief Justice formed the Public Service and Trust Commission. The initial step was information-gathering, including the surveys and focus groups, where all different people who have contact with the system provided input on their experiences and the trends and impacts they saw coming in the next three to five years. The information was categorized into five broad areas and committees were established to address access, changing demographics, delivery of services, collaboration, and accountability. The plan, which contained outcome goals and strategies to address the needs of the people the branch serves was completed and submitted to the Chief Justice in June of this year. Judge DiPentima, the chair of the commission, Judge Quinn, Judge Carroll and the Chief Justice developed an implementation plan, which includes 28 initiatives, through already-existing committees and through seven new committees that were formed. This committee is one of the new committees, and it will look at the issue of expectations of the public. The charge is to identify and recommend specific activities so that the public and others who come in contact with us will know what to expect when they come to court and also how they would be expected to conduct themselves. The branch already has some programs in existence, including Court Service Centers, public information desks, publications, information on the website, but this committee will look at ways to improve those things already in existence and add to them.
3. Review of committee charge from Commission – Judge Beach briefly reviewed the committee charge, which members of the committee had received prior to the meeting.
4. Overview and discussion of existing information – Support staff provided a brief overview of current branch offerings for the public, including publications, website information, and services through the service centers, information desks, and law libraries.

A question was raised with respect to the information that had been obtained from the focus groups during the information-gathering phase of the strategic planning process. A member of each subcommittee might want to review the information from the focus groups, but the information from the groups was reviewed, first by the committee on accountability, and subsequently, by the Chief Justice, Judge Quinn, Judge Carroll, and Judge DiPentima in the course of developing the initiatives of the implementation plan. The items that pertained specifically to this committee have been incorporated into the committee charge. The complete compilation of focus group materials is available on the website and can be provided to anyone who might be interested in reviewing it.

5. Discussion of Timeline – The committee deadline is March, 2009. However, because the committees have begun working somewhat later than was originally planned, that date is not final. The committee will view that date as a goal to be met.
6. Formation of subcommittees – The committee discussed the possible subcommittees. The original suggestions were housing, criminal/motor vehicle, support enforcement/family, and small claims. It was suggested that a fifth subcommittee on juvenile be added because there is a need for assistance in that area as well. The committee unanimously agreed that juvenile should be added as a subcommittee.

It was recognized that some overlap among these subcommittees could occur because certain parts of the court process are common to all areas, for example, going through the metal detector. It may be that each subcommittee will address it or possibly it could be addressed by one group and incorporated into other subcommittees' materials.

Discussion ensued as to whether the committee needed additional members who were not so involved in the judicial system. A person from the outside might see things from a fresh perspective. The point was made that the purpose of the initial information-gathering phase of the strategic planning process was to obtain feedback from the public and that feedback is available to this committee. Also, attorneys on the committee provide a perspective from outside of the system as well. In the event that a particular subcommittee would like to obtain more information, they are able to do so as necessary.

It was pointed out that it is also important to be aware of the audience for any materials or information that is provided. A suggestion was made that the best way to reach people in this day and age is through television. The committee might consider the possibility of creating short programs that could be broadcast on public access television or as public service spots. They would follow an individual interacting with the courts, including going to court on a motor vehicle matter, being a part of the voir dire process, and learning about the various diversionary programs. The subcommittees might consider a recommendation on the creation of a video program.

Committee members were asked to submit their preference for a subcommittee. The assignments will be done by the co-chairs and sent to each person. The co-chairs will also select chairs for the subcommittees who will coordinate with support staff to schedule subcommittee meetings. It was suggested that subcommittees would probably have at least three meetings to accomplish the tasks, which should be concrete and specific. The chair people will contact the members of the subcommittees.

7. Future meetings (times, locations, and frequency) – Judge Beach asked whether there was a consensus from the committee members on the best day and time to schedule meetings. Overall, it appeared that Wednesdays and Thursdays were preferable.

The subcommittees will be meeting over the next two months, and it was suggested that it would be a good idea to have a meeting of the full committee to discuss what each subcommittee was doing, make sure all subcommittees were not experiencing any difficulties, and all members to exchange ideas. After a brief discussion, the committee unanimously decided to schedule an interim meeting in February.

8. Additional issues for discussion at future meetings – No issues for discussion were raised.

There being no further business, Judge Shluger moved that the meeting be adjourned. Judge Olear seconded the motion. Upon unanimous vote, the meeting adjourned at 4:05.