

# SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

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## City, county to seek jail system savings

Council postpones transfer of inmates

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The Spokane City Council on Monday joined the county in a wide-ranging effort to reform the local criminal justice system to save money.

An agreement unanimously approved by the council postpones a city plan to send up to 50 inmates to Benton County, a move that could save the city up to \$1 million annually.

Gavin Cooley, the city's chief financial officer, said city and county officials are working together toward ways to save money and reduce inmate populations.

As much as \$6 million to \$7 million in savings may be possible, he said.

Such savings would ease budget stress for the city, which is facing a shortfall of up to \$10 million in 2013.

Keys to the plan are providing sentencing alternatives and moving offenders through the courts more quickly.

Mental health court, drug court and early case resolution have been shown to reduce incarceration rates. So does education. Anger management classes, for example, are credited with reducing domestic violence.

The county charges the city \$130 a day for each inmate arrested and held on city charges – misdemeanors and gross misdemeanors. Benton County has been offering a reduced rate of \$56 a day.

County officials said they hope to have the changes in place so the savings can begin next year.

Under the agreement approved Monday, the city could not pull away from the Spokane jail until next year at the earliest.

Cooley said one goal of the reforms is to find enough savings to finance a scaled-down project for a new jail. Last year, officials were considering a ballot measure asking voters to approve \$200 million in jail facilities.

That proposal could be pared to between \$80 million and \$100 million, Cooley said.

If enough savings are found, the city and county might be able finance new facilities through regular tax collections.