

Tuesday, Mar. 29, 2011

[1 Comment](#)

## Benton courts getting upgrades

By John Trumbo, Herald staff writer

Benton County courts are scheduled to have electronic reader boards, iPad computers for jury check-in and much improved sound systems in several Superior Courts by the end of next year.

Commissioners Monday approved spending about \$198,000 in trial court improvement money to upgrade court facilities.

Pat Austin, Superior Court administrator, and Josie Delvin, county clerk, said the improvements will better serve the public and save staff time by making court information more available.

The improvements also will provide more computer monitors for District and Superior Courts, headsets for court interpreters and allow for installation of court security cameras.

It's the second time this month that commissioners have been asked to spend money to meet court and justice needs.

The Juvenile Detention Center requested \$187,000 at a March 16 commission meeting to restore three full-time detention officer positions so it won't be necessary to give young offenders early releases from detention.

Commissioners hesitated at spending money from the general fund for the detention officers, saying they would rather see changes in priorities in the juvenile justice budget to make the \$187,000 available.

Monday's decision to spend \$198,000 was easier, said David Sparks, county administrator.

"That is money of a different color," said Sparks in discussing the trial court improvement fund.

"We couldn't have used that money for juvenile detention officers. It comes as a rebate from the state on a portion of our judges' salaries and must be used for court improvements," Sparks said.

Also Monday, commissioners approved Sparks' employment contract for the next two years, granting his request that he not receive the full 5 percent annual increase negotiated in 2009 when he assumed new responsibilities overseeing the department of public works. Sparks was supposed to receive a 5 percent pay boost annually, but will accept 1 percent annually for the next four years.

"I gave up the guaranteed 5 percent," said Sparks, whose salary is \$122,628.

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