

From The Beat To The Bench April 2010

Vermilion Municipal Courts goal is to provide justice to the citizens of Vermilion and the surrounding townships in the most efficient and professional manner possible. However, we understand how difficult the City's finances are in the current troubled economy. We do cover our costs so as not to be a burden to the City of Vermilion. We pay our operating costs with costs collected from court cases. For many years the court costs we collect have exceeded our expenditures. The Vermilion City Council is responsible for approving the Court's budget. The Finance Director approves all purchases and pays the court's invoices.

Vermilion Municipal Court serves the City of Vermilion and the Townships of Vermilion, Brownhelm and Florence under Ohio law. Vermilion is somewhat unique with it being situated in both Erie and Lorain Counties. This determines where the fine is disbursed and what county jail will be used to house a prisoner.

Some of the agencies that file cases in our Court are: Vermilion Police Department, Ohio State Highway Patrol Posts from Erie, Lorain and Huron counties and Ohio State Highway Patrol Post from the Ohio Turnpike, Erie County Sheriff Office, Lorain County Sheriff Office, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Lorain County Metro Parks, Erie County Dog Warden, Lorain County Dog Warden, Department of Liquor Control, Department of Taxation and many others.

Many courts have separate budgets for the Judge and Clerk. In Vermilion we have one budget for the entire operation of the Vermilion Municipal Court. The Judge and Clerk cooperate on purchases, such as computers that are used throughout the Courts offices. The difficult part of determining the Court's budget is that it has no ability to control the number of cases it receives.

The City of Vermilion has recently approved a temporary budget which is 85% of the 2009 budget. Salaries and benefits account for about 90% of the general fund budget. The State of Ohio, Erie County and Lorain County reimburse the City of Vermilion for the salaries and benefits of the Judge, Visiting Judge, Clerk of Court and Bailiff. The costs are split with 40% coming from Lorain and Erie counties and 60% from the City of

Vermilion. The Finance Department handles the reimbursement due to the City. The Court has special funds in place to cover the cost of computer improvement, capital projects, legal research, court education, security, vehicle maintenance, indigent alcohol treatment and ignition interlock.

The court employs five full time employees; Tami Horton, Clerk of Court, Michelle Fiegelist, Chief Deputy Clerk/Bailiff, Liz Henderson, Deputy Clerk, Candy McDoniel, Deputy Clerk and Stephanie Lukovics, Deputy Clerk along with four part-time employees; Dick Baker, Bailiff, Randy Strickland, Probation Officer and Security Officers Norm Hendrickson and Mike Levelle. The position of Vermilion Municipal Court Judge is part-time and is elected for a term of six years.

A common misconception about court costs and fines is that all money collected stays in Vermilion. The Court's overall revenue in 2009 was \$1,018,196.96. However, only a portion stays in Vermilion. The Court, by law, must forward all or a portion of the fines collected to each agency that filed the case in our Court. The Court must also forward the costs to the appropriate State agency, City of Vermilion or special fund. There are special funds for programs for alcohol treatment, indigent offender, computer upgrades and legal research.

The standard court costs for Vermilion Municipal Court is \$80.00. From this amount \$22.00 is forwarded to the City of Vermilion. The State of Ohio funds receive \$39.00 and the special Court funds receive \$19.00. The fines are disbursed to the County, State and City according to the arresting agency. The City of Vermilion receives 40% of the fine, 50% is forwarded to the State of Ohio and 10% to the county where the violation occurred on all Ohio State Highway Patrol cases. When a person is convicted of an OVI the Court will collect additional mandatory costs for the State of Ohio, the County where the offense occurred and the City of Vermilion. The cost for a civil action varies according to the type of filing. Court costs continue to rise due to recent law changes. The Court has no control over the increases but must collect and forward the costs on behalf of the agencies according to State law.

We strive to collect all money due to the Court. When a person is unable to pay the full amount due an agreement is signed by the Defendant to make regular monthly payments.

If the Defendant defaults on the agreement his license will be forfeited and the balance due is forwarded to our collection agency for further action.

The Court has plans to update its computer system along with installing equipment to handle video arraignments with the Erie County Sheriff Office. By using the video arraignment system the City of Vermilion along with Erie County will reduce the costs of transporting prisoners to Court. We have been using the e-certified process for serving civil paperwork for the last five years which saves \$1.00 per mailing.

Our 2009 annual report is on file at the Clerk's office. The Vermilion Municipal Court is open Monday through Friday 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. Court is in session all day Tuesdays and Thursday afternoon. Probation hours are Tuesday 8:00 am to 4:00 pm, Thursdays 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm and Friday 8:00 am to 12:00 pm. You may reach the Court at 440 204-2430 during regular business hours. All records are online at www.vermilionmunicipalcourt.org. We encourage you to visit our website to view your case file, court docket or to make an online payment. Mastercard and Visa may be used to make online payments.

We hope this information is informative and helps our citizens understand how the Vermilion Municipal Court is funded.