

# Video Magistrate

Council Public Safety Committee

March 3, 2008

Key Focus Area



Public Safety

# What is Video Magistrate?

- State law (Article 27.18), effective September 1997, which allows a court to “accept a plea or waiver by broadcast by closed circuit video teleconferencing to the court.”

# Background

- A video magistrate pilot program was tested approximately 10 years ago at the Lew Sterrett Justice Center.
- Video magistrate was not reviewed as favorable by the Judiciary as there were challenges with the technology at the time, such as noise interference.

# Who is using Video Magistrate?

- 5 Texas Counties

- Collin
- Dallas
- Harris
- McLennan
- Tarrant

- Texas Cities

- Bryan
- Beaumont
- Wichita Falls



# Pros of using Video Magistrate



- Eliminates the travel of a judge and the staffing of a bailiff to an off-site location.
- Eliminates any judicial security concerns for a judge at an off-site location.
  - Expressed at a Judge's meeting in April 2007
- Since the pleas would be recorded, a record of the pleas would be available.
- Dallas County is already using video magistrate, so transition to this program would be easier.
- Video Magistrate equipment is very user-friendly and offers excellent clarity.

# Video Magistrate Equipment



- The cost is about \$12K for two monitors (one shown at left). If recording is required, there may be an additional cost.
- Equipment qualifies for purchase through the Municipal Court Technology Fund.

# Cons of using Video Magistrate

- The City of Dallas' Administrative Judge has expressed legal concerns with video magistrate.
- Must ensure that the equipment is properly working at all times.

# Recommendation



- Court & Detention Services will develop an operational plan to conduct a pilot program.
- Request the Judiciary's cooperation and participation in a pilot program of video magistrate and provide feedback.
- Conduct the pilot program for one month in April 2008.
- If the program proves to be a benefit to the City, request a Judicial Directive from the Administrative Judge implementing a video magistrate process by June 2008.

Questions?

