



MUNI MINUTES

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MISSOULA MUNICIPAL COURT

COMMUNITY COURT

Launched in 2022, ComMUNIty Court (formerly known as Shelter Court) is a Municipal Court program that brings court services to Missoula's unhoused neighbors at the Poverello Center, the Watershed Navigation Center, and the Missoula Public Library. **Participants address warrants and new charges, speak with judges and public defenders, confirm court dates, and connect with essential community resources.**

Studies show that most non-appearances are involuntary. Barriers to court appearances include lack of transportation or childcare, inflexible work schedules, lack of a cell phone or date tracking capabilities, and general lack of basic needs being met. These issues are compounded by individuals experiencing poverty and houselessness. ComMUNIty Court reduces these barriers by meeting people where they are.

In preparation for ComMUNIty Court, the Court collaborates with the City Attorney's Office and the Office of Public Defenders to create priority defendant lists, craft plea agreements, and ensure defendants speak with their attorney. As a result, **the average length of cases seen in ComMUNIty Court has decreased by over 50%**. This creates more equitable outcomes for defendants and allows for more efficient use of valuable public resources.

The Process:



*Priority Defendant List is shared with MCES providers



MCES Providers inform clients about ComMUNIty Court



Defendants appear virtually with a Public Defender.



Defendants meet with the pretrial support team (PASS) and other community resources



Community Collaboration

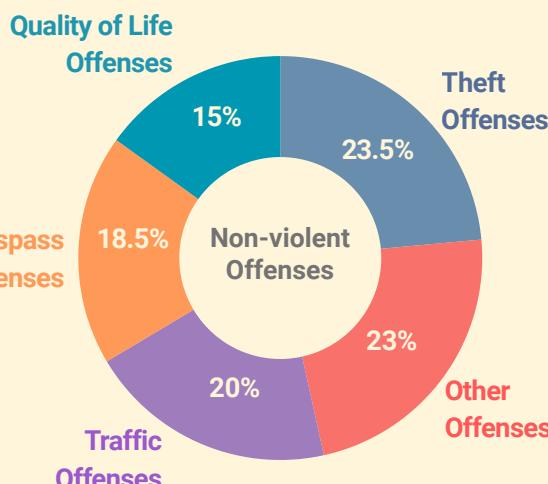
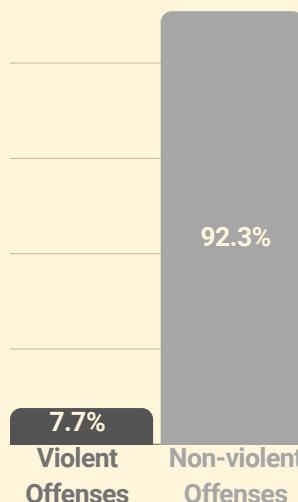
A major component of ComMUNIty Court is its collaborative partnerships with various community providers, increasing access to resources and court programs at no additional cost to the Court. ComMUNIty Court also hosts a monthly one-stop resource hub at the Watershed Navigation Center. Attendees are able to connect with a plethora of essential community resources, including:

- Free Vaccines
- Free Haircuts
- Free Lunch
- Job Services
- Library Services
- Pretrial Support (PASS Program)
- ID and Birth Certificate Assistance
- Housing Navigation & Support
- Medical & Behavioral Health Support
- Community Advocacy & Peer Support

*The **Priority Defendant List** identifies defendants with outstanding warrants or new charges by cross-referencing court records with the **Missoula Coordinated Entry System's (MCES)** list of currently unhoused individuals.

ComMUNIty Court Offenses

2022-2025



Since its inception in 2022, ComMUNIty Court has seen an increasing number of defendants. In 2023, the program expanded to two locations: the Poverello Center and the Johnson Street Shelter. In 2024, the program incorporated several service providers, which not only improved access to vital resources but also greatly increased the number of people utilizing court services. In 2025, following the closure of the Johnson Street Shelter, ComMUNIty Court chose the Watershed Navigation Center as a new location. Expanding to these locations allows ComMUNIty Court to combine court services with services provided by the Watershed and Poverello centers, such as warmth, food, laundry services, immunizations, and connection with providers. Additionally, 2026 has seen the incorporation of the Missoula Public Library as a third ComMUNIty Court location.

“You people have all been very helpful and appreciate all the help, treating me like a person is the main thing. Most people look at me like I'm less-than.
~ Participant

“Having ComMUNIty Court at the Watershed Navigation Center is the epitome of wrap around services coming together to support populations stuck in some of our most challenging societal systems.

~ Chaz Rourke, Watershed Navigation Manager

Demographics:

ComMUNIty Court Participants



Missoula's Unhoused Population*



City of Missoula Population**



White

Native American / Indigenous

Black / African American

Asian / Pacific Islander

*Missoula Coordinated Entry System, January 2026

**US Census Data; July 1, 2024

Overall, 1,021 cases have been seen in ComMUNIty Court. 382 cases were initial appearances, and 672 resulted in warrants quashed. The vast majority of charges addressed in ComMUNIty Court are non-violent (92.3%). The largest categories of non-violent offenses are theft (23.5%), traffic offenses (20%), and trespass (18.5%).

Approximately 15% of the charges are for “Quality of Life” offenses, such as camping in city limits, being in parks after hours, or other offenses associated with being unhoused. The remaining 23% are a myriad of offenses, including obstructing a peace officer, criminal mischief, or other offenses against public order.

Defendant Appearances

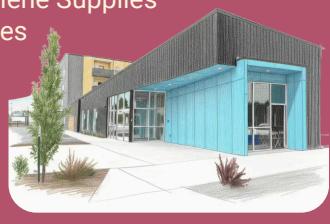
2022-2025



ComMUNIty Spotlight: Watershed Navigation Center

Opened in 2025, The Watershed Navigation Center is a safe and welcoming day center for individuals and families experiencing housing instability and legal involvement in our community. Watershed is a perfect place to hold ComMUNIty Court and meet people in a warm, stable environment while also providing access to the Navigation Center's daily resources:

- Document Storage
- Clothing & Hygiene Supplies
- Laundry Services
- Food & Drink
- Mail Services
- Lockers



For more information about ComMUNIty Court, visit our website: www.missoula.org/community-court

