



 [Print this page](#)  [Close](#)

## For \$10.8 million, Fulton adopts a cost-cutting measure

By [Johnny Edwards](#)  
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

2:46 p.m. Tuesday, March 15, 2011

When taxpayer advocate John Sherman resigned from a group formed to stop Milton County secession last month, he said it was because the Fulton commission has adopted "not a single one" of the cost-cutting recommendations made by three committees in 2006 and 2008.

That's not the case anymore.

One of the recommendations of the blue-ribbon committee that examined the justice system was to streamline the computerized tracking of court cases, eliminating a faulty process that had inmates sitting in jail months past their release dates because the sheriff's office didn't get notification from Superior Court, according to attorney Emmet Bondurant, who chaired the committee.

For that purpose, the county has signed a \$10.8 million contract with Plano, Texas-based Tyler Technologies, Inc., to install a Web-based jail and court case management system called Odyssey. It replaces systems dating back to pre-Y2K upgrades and will serve as a single data entry program for the sheriff's office, Superior Court, State Court, the District Attorney's office, the Solicitor's office, the Clerk's office, the Public Defender's office, Probate Court and Magistrate Court, according to IT Director Ryan Fernandes and county documents.

Current systems used by various offices "don't talk to each other," Fernandes said. Odyssey, which will take about a year and a half to be completely up and running, should put everyone on the same digital page. .

Sherman said he was unaware of the Odyssey deal when he made the statement last month, and he's glad to hear a recommendation has been followed. But it's only one of dozens -- not enough to move him to re-join the One Fulton County advisory committee and not enough to appease Milton County advocates who often cite the ignored committees as a grievance.

"They've got to dust off those reports and review them again," Sherman said. "I beg them, before it's too late."

Some Fulton officials say the county has done what it could do.

Superior Court Chief Judge Cynthia Wright said the courts tried to address all the issues brought up by the justice committee. Several other recommendations were followed, she said, such as an effort to divert the homeless and mentally ill through drug and mental health courts, merging Superior and State courts' pre-trial services and addressing case backlogs and delays with a \$1.2 million federal grant.

More changes are in progress, and some are stymied by factors out of the courts' control, Wright said. On the recommendation to buy or lease the Atlanta jail to increase inmate capacity, negotiations between the city and the county are at an impasse.

A tally on file with the county manager's office says the county acted on six of 17 recommendations by the joint legislative subcommittee, including installing new case management hardware, negotiating on the Atlanta jail and adopting board goals to address complaints of micromanaging commissioners. The document says 11 measures are the General Assembly's responsibility to adopt.

That's disingenuous, said House Majority Whip Ed Lindsey, who co-chaired the subcommittee, seeing as how commissioners lobbied against the measures to Democrats who control the Fulton legislative delegations.

Chairman John Eaves said he agrees it's time to take another look at the three- and five-year-old reports.

"Now is the time for us, as a county, to re-calibrate our operations so we can do a more effective job of serving our constituents,"

How much money will be saved by Odyssey taking over court filing management is difficult to pin down. The new system is designed to improve efficiency, speeding up the flow of backlogged cases.

"Ultimately, that leads to a cost savings because you can get people processed out of the jail faster," Fernandes said.

Jail overcrowding has plagued Fulton for years, costing taxpayers millions of dollars. Last year, the county spent \$6.3 million housing inmates in other jurisdictions' jails to keep the daily population below the federally-mandated 2,500 cap, according to sheriff's office records. On average, Fulton had 300 inmates over the limit per day.

---

Find this article at:

 [Print this page](#)  [Close](#)

<http://www.ajc.com/news/atlanta/for-10-8-million-873450.html>