

POLK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Minutes of December 17, 2014

Independence Public Library, 175 Monmouth St., Independence, OR 97351

1. CALL TO ORDER & ATTENDANCE

At 6:00 p.m., Commissioner Pope called the declared the meeting of the Polk County Board of Commissioners to be in session. Commissioner Ainsworth and Commissioner Wheeler were present.

Staff present: Greg Hansen, Administrative Officer
 Sheriff Bob Wolfe
 District Attorney Aaron Felton
 Community Corrections/Juvenile Director Marty Silbernagel

2. PUBLIC HEARING: PROPOSED OPERATING LEVY

Greg Hansen explained that in November, he recommended that the Board consider placing a local option tax measure on the May 2015 ballot in the amount of \$0.45/\$1,000 assessed value for five years (meaning taxes on a \$200,000 home would increase by \$90 annually). The Board accepted this recommendation, and this is the first of nine public hearings to collect public input on this process. The Board will make a final decision on moving forward on this process or not after the final public hearing. Since 2008, the staffing levels within the Polk County Public Safety system have dropped from 112 FTE (full-time equivalents), to 78 FTE, an over 30% drop. The proposed levy would “buy” 22 FTE: 12 in Sheriff-Patrol, 5 in Sheriff-Jail, 5 in District Attorney-Prosecution, and 2 Juvenile detention beds.

Commissioner Pope opened the Public Hearing.

Mike Nearman, 2570 Greenwood Rd., Independence, OR 97351, testified that Government isn't good at shrinking budgets, and when they do, it always seems to come out of the public safety services budget, which is disappointing. He thinks that nothing much has changed since the County failed on the last levy attempt, and questioned in the Sheriff's Patrol budget, why there is a 2:1 ratio of Deputies to management/supervisory employees. The Sheriff explained that the reason for the high supervisory ratio is because all of the non-management positions are in a collective bargaining unit and if he has to use call them in after hours, he has to pay overtime for these employees. The Sergeants (management) employees do not get paid overtime, which makes it more cost effective to keep more Sergeants. DA Felton also explained that he has cut management in his office and all managers also do line work.

E.M. Easterly, 775 Fir Gardens St. NW, Salem, OR 97304, believes that the highest responsibility of elected officials is to provide public safety, and asked why the County feels this proposed levy will garner more support than the last levy attempt. Mr. Easterly provided some of his own calculations for the levy cost, which Greg Hansen provided additional details on. Greg explained that property taxes collected pay for a number of services (schools, roads, fire districts, etc.), and the percentage of taxes that residents pay towards the County varies by where they live and the assessed value of their property. Commissioner Ainsworth explained that the very reason that the Board is holding these public hearings is to determine the public's position on the proposal, and to explain to the public how the whole public safety system is already impacted by the County's declining public safety departments. Commissioner Wheeler also explained that the cost to rebuild the public safety system once it is so gutted is far more than to just maintain a system, because the investment in staff lost to cuts takes years to rebuild.

Carol Kreig, 784 Stearman St., Independence, OR 97351, announced that she voted no on the last levy because she lives in the airpark in Independence and already pays very high taxes. She would like to see a more detailed breakdown of the budget and what her taxes go towards. The Board invited the audience to attend the Budget Committee meetings in the spring and explained the Polk County budget is available on the website and for public perusal in the Courthouse. She also encouraged the County to utilize volunteers to save resources. The Sheriff and District Attorney countered that volunteers are already used for SALT, CASA, Search & Rescue, Grand Jury, Law Clerk Interns, and Sheriff Reserves, but there is difficulty finding volunteers that will pass background checks.

Commissioner Pope explained that the last operating levy amount of \$.60/\$1,000 was chosen to fully restore the services that were lost from the O&C Timber funding. This attempt is \$.45/\$1,000 will not restore full service that have been lost, but will restore enough FTE to get back to a level of functional operation.

Sheriff Wolfe explained what role and services his office offers to residents living in city limits. Including jail bookings, civil services, Search & Rescue, POINT, accident response on the highway. The Sheriff explained that POINT is not currently functioning and will be shut down as of the first of the year, the effect the loss of drug-enforcement so far is a 52% drop in drug arrests. The Sheriff also explained that the State Police are just as understaffed and not available to patrol or backup cities on a regular basis.

Ray Godfrey from Buena Vista testified that the natural resources standing out in the woods right now would provide enough funding for public safety, and asked what the Commissioners are doing to get these O&C funds back?

Alan Garton from Pedee asked how many people in the City limits voted down the last levy attempt. Those figures were not available. Mr. Garton suggested the Board consider creating two separate taxing districts, one county-wide for DA, Jail, Corrections, and one outside only for rural residents for patrol. Greg explained that creating two separate taxing districts would require four 'yes' votes in an election, and the administrative costs would be higher to manage two new districts than the current costs.

Ann Sheck asked for factual numbers of salary and staff numbers of comparably sized counties. Greg Hansen provided staff numbers of Polk County compared to Yamhill county for each department impacted by the General Fund. Greg explained that we have the lowest FTE ratio in the state compared to size.

Ken Mayer from Dallas commented that government asking for higher taxes is never ending. Once the five year levy is complete the County will be asking for another five years. Greg Hansen explained that the County has only asked the Voters to increase taxes four times in the last 29 years: 1986 Road bond, 1996 Jail Bond, 2006 Road Bond, and last years public safety operating levy which failed.

Russ Knoll from West Salem testified that even though the Sheriff's office has a high management to line staff ratio, all of the managers also work, not just supervise. Mr. Knoll explained that since moving to Polk County, he has had five incidents that required him to call the Sheriff, and the response was incredible. He would like to keep it that way.

Victoria Kruljac from Independence testified that if Polk County taxes are based on assessed value, why are reassessments not allowed when home prices drop? Greg explained how property taxes are assessed.

Moy Midkiff from Dallas testified that she has had wonderful help from the Polk County public safety system and will do anything in her power to get this levy passed.

Gary Brown from Independence explained that he is a former police officer, and understands the funding challenges. Mr. Brown asked about what the plan for the future is to trim the budget more. Marty Silbernagel explained that the County is up for a grant-type program called Evidence Based Decision Making which will look at the County's public safety system as a whole and assess where improvements can be made.

Gene Henshaw from Dallas explained that he and his wife volunteered for Sheriff Wolfe for eight years and testified that the department is ran very efficiently. In addition, to patrol and the jail, the Sheriff is required to provide court security, which is not happening now due to budget cuts. This puts the judge, attorneys, and defendant at risk.

Marty Silbernagel explained how the entire public safety system works together to affect his agency. The less deputies on the road, the less arrests are made, the less arrests, the less prosecutions, and the less prosecutions, the less felon and misdemeanor offenders that his agency has to supervise. And his funding is based on the number of offenders that he is supervising.

Rod Buchanan, a rural Dallas resident, testified that recently someone broke the window of his car, and the deductible that he had to pay was \$250. \$90 per year is worth the cost to prevent these type of crimes from ever happening in the first place.

Lynette Henshaw from Dallas, encouraged everyone in attendance to invite their friends and neighbors to the upcoming public hearings, whether they are for or against the levy.

3. ADJOURN

Commissioner Pope reminded the public of the other scheduled upcoming public hearings on this issue.

Hearing no further business, Commissioner Pope adjourned the meeting at 7:45 p.m.

POLK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Mike Ainsworth, Chair

Jennifer Wheeler, Commissioner

Craig Pope, Commissioner

Minutes: Heather Merrill
Approved: January 7, 2015