

**POLK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

**Minutes of January 6, 2015**

**Falls City Community Center, 320 N Main St., Falls City, OR 97344**

**1. CALL TO ORDER & ATTENDANCE**

At 6:02 p.m., Commissioner Pope declared the meeting of the Polk County Board of Commissioners to be in session. Commissioner Ainsworth and Commissioner Wheeler were present.

Staff present:           Matt Hawkins, Administrative Services Director  
                                  Sheriff Bob Wolfe  
                                  Community Corrections/Juvenile Director Marty Silbernagel  
                                  District Attorney Aaron Felton

**2. PUBLIC HEARING: PROPOSED OPERATING LEVY**

Matt Hawkins explained that in November, Administrative Officer Greg Hansen 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 third 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 be used to restore 22 FTE: 12 in Sheriff-Patrol, 5 in Sheriff-Jail, 5 in District Attorney-Prosecution, and 2 Juvenile detention beds.

Sheriff Wolfe explained the funding crisis the county is facing is not caused by a mismanagement of funds, but the result of the loss of O&C timber funding. Since 2008, the County has seen reductions and eventual elimination in payments that had been received from the harvesting of Federal Timber Land located in Polk County. This has created over a \$2.4 million shortfall for the County General Fund, which is where a majority of public safety funding is budgeted from. This is the reason why the public safety system in the County has been cut so dramatically. These cuts have resulted in the elimination of 24/7 patrol coverage, minimum staffing in the jail (resulting in increased overtime expenses), and the deactivation of POINT (County drug enforcement and investigations). The only way to restore these services is the ballot measure that is proposed. Without more funding, things will not get better.

District Attorney Aaron Felton explained that his office has the lowest staff of any other similarly sized counties in the state. Because of cuts that his office has already made, the office is no longer able to handle child abuse and child welfare cases, along with juvenile dependencies, which have all been turned over to the state, which causes a disconnect with related cases. The cuts have also resulted in an increased workload for all of his Deputy District Attorneys, which may eventually cause him to have to choose which types of crimes that he will be able to prosecute (misdemeanors/felonies).

Commissioner Pope opened the Public Hearing.

Rose Dorn, 1840 Sterling St, Monmouth, testified that she feels property owners are being discriminated against. When she moved here, she was incorrectly informed that property taxes are capped at \$3,000 per year, but now her taxes are approaching \$4,000, and is not supportive of increasing taxes even more. Ms. Dorn feels that there is frequent mismanagement of tax dollars at every level, including Salem River Crossing, Columbia River Bridge, etc. and too many

people have control of the tax dollars. There has been minimal growth in the County, and responsible leaders should be finding ways to shrink government instead of growing it. Ms. Dorn also commented that PERS costs have increased by 44% over the last 10 years, and can only assume that it will continue to increase as salaries increase. Costs for Medicare, Indigent care, Section 8, Welfare, free school meals for children and Obamacare are a strain on Ms. Dorn, on her \$60,000 fixed income. Ms. Dorn was also critical of having a union in Government because governments can just keep taxing and the middle class are being taxed to death. Ms. Dorn also commented that she believes the Government is sending the wrong message to youth by sanctioning marijuana, and offering sex education classes to students, and thinks that if the Government was not encouraging this type of behavior with youth, there would be no need for increased deputies.

Amy Houghtaling 137 Carey Court in Falls City, acknowledged that the Patrol Deputies have taken the cuts in stride, have still been honorable public servants, and responded to calls as often as possible. Ms. Houghtaling asked for prosecution numbers for 2014 in the District Attorney's office compared to previous years to better show a trend: DA Felton explained that his misdemeanors in the past two years are down, but felonies have mainly remained consistent. The misdemeanor drop was expected because the City of Dallas Municipal Court has taken over their share of those cases. Marty Silbernagel also provided a handout of parole and probation case numbers from his office. Ms. Houghtaling also explained that a fair amount of the issues in Falls City are during summer, from people drinking, being loud, and having firearms in the parks. When the Sheriff is called, it is explained that these issues are city code enforcement issue, but Ms. Houghtaling questioned if this levy passes, is this something that patrol would be able to help more with. The Sheriff explained that as Sheriff he does not have authority to enforce city ordinance code, but if he had more officers, he may be able to respond just to have more of a presence and eliminate some of these issues as he did in the past. Right now, there are just no resources to respond. The Sheriff explained that there has been a 19% increase for calls for service from inside Falls City, and an 11% increase in reports that have been taken, but across the County, the calls for service have dropped by 33% since last year.

Ms. Houghtaling asked what Sanction Court was and what the process is for that. It is a program for all minor juvenile crimes. The participants attend, have a chance to speak, and then the panel of volunteers and staff impose sanctions/consequences on them. The program only has about a 7% recidivism rate, but Commissioner Ainsworth expressed his concern with how the legalization of marijuana will affect the accessibility of the drug to youth. Ms. Houghtaling wanted the audience to understand that helping fund the public safety system will help allow the County the flexibility to get back into doing presentations for schools, doing the prevention pieces needed with the youth, and being more proactive to stop crime before it starts.

Tracy Young, 146 Sheldon St., Falls City, asked about what services probation provides. Marty explained the difference between parole, probation, and post-prison supervision. The Community Corrections department supervises over 700 adults and 175 juveniles in the county via office visits, urine testing (425 per month), and his staff make approximately 25 arrests per month for probation violations. Ms. Young expressed her concern with the drug problem in Falls City. Ms. Young also wants the Sheriff's office to do their "due diligence" in Falls City if the levy is passed, because some residents feel that because the tax base there is lower, there is not as much effort from the Sheriff's department to respond to issues within the city limits. The Sheriff countered that Falls City is treated the same as any other part of the County, but call responses are based on the priority of the call. And as mentioned before, the resources to respond are limited. Ms. Young also asked why sometimes when a person gets arrested, they are released and back on the streets

within hours of being arrested. Marty answered that it is dependent on the judge and if they grant bail. If so, then the person can be released once bail is posted.

Terry Ungricht, 635 Chamberlain, Falls City, and Mayor of Falls City, asked whether or not there has been any movement on the O&C Timber funding. Commissioner Pope answered that these funding issues have been stalled over the past several years, but with the change in leadership in 2015, he is hopeful that the legislation for this funding will begin to move forward. However, Craig cautioned that if any funding does return to the O&C Counties, it will still never be equivalent to the amounts that counties have previously received. Mr. Ungricht also questioned that even though curfew in the park and other code enforcement issues are not under the jurisdiction of the Sheriff, if there was a way that the City could have an intergovernmental agreement with the Sheriff's Office to enforce these issues. The Sheriff answered that an IGA could be established to grant him the authority to enforce the city Code of Ordinances, but again, without more resources it is not a possibility.

Lori Albert, 315 Whitman St., Monmouth, testified that she is a local public safety volunteer, and is supporting the levy because as a first responder, not having Sheriff response and stabilization after 10pm puts her at risk and limits her ability to help the victims of crimes and crashes.

Rod Buchanan, a rural Dallas resident, testified that recently someone broke the window of his car to steal a bible. Rod had to pay \$350 out of pocket to repair the vehicle, since his deductible was \$500. Rod feels that paying \$90 per year (or less than \$0.25 per day) for more law enforcement is worth the cost to prevent these type of crimes from ever happening in the first place. The lack of law enforcement is also starting to affect the commerce in this county. There are some winery facilities that have already refused to locate their business here because of the lack of protection. As a business owner, Rod is concerned that increased crime, decreased public safety, will cause this county to lose commerce, people, and tax base.

Russ Knoll, Oak Grove Road in West Salem commented that the incorporated areas of Polk County have their own police department but all other parts of the public safety system are provided by the County (DA, Corrections, Jail). Mr. Knoll encouraged everyone in attendance to start a phone chain and invite their friends and family to attend one of the remaining hearings, post on facebook and write letters to the editor in support of our local law enforcement.

Dave Simmons questioned what the total number of current Public Safety employees are and how many will be added. Matt Hawkins explained that there are currently 78 FTE. If the levy passes, it would restore 22 FTE, bringing the total Public Safety FTE in the County to 100.

### **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 7:31 p.m.

**POLK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

---

Mike Ainsworth, Chair

---

Jennifer Wheeler, Commissioner

---

Craig Pope, Commissioner

Minutes: Heather Merrill  
Approved: January 21, 2015