

POLK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Minutes of January 8, 2015

Grand Ronde Community Center, 9615 Grand Ronde Rd., Grand Ronde, OR 97347

1. CALL TO ORDER & ATTENDANCE

At 6:04 p.m., Commissioner Ainsworth declared the meeting of the Polk County Board of Commissioners to be in session. Commissioner Pope 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 Sheriff's office has also seen a 47% drop in DUUI arrests and a 54% drop in drug arrests over the last year, putting everyone who lives in the County at risk. The only way to restore these services is the ballot measure that is proposed. Without more funding, things will not get better. Sheriff Wolfe went on to explain that the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde previously contracted with the Sheriff's department through a grant from the Community Fund for law enforcement services on the reservation, but as the tribe developed their own police force, that contract was eliminated. However, the Sheriff's office continues to serve as a back up for the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde police department and is still responsible for the law enforcement services everywhere else in the Grand Ronde area that is outside the reservation.

Commissioner Ainsworth opened the Public Hearing.

Shawn Robinson, 29790 Jo Day Way, expressed concern with the amount of uncollected property taxes, and how much of the general fund monies go toward public safety. The Sheriff explained that approximately 67% of the total general fund go towards the public safety departments in the County, with 46% approximately going to the Sheriff's office. Commissioner Pope explained that most uncollected taxes are collected in the following fiscal year, and the remaining in following years. It is rare for a house to get foreclosed on from unpaid taxes, they are usually paid before it gets to that point.

Reyn Leno, 9615 Grand Ronde Rd., Grand Ronde, OR, is the Tribal Chair of the Confederated Tribe of Grand Ronde and read the following statement on behalf of the Tribe.

“The Tribal Government provides our own Grand Ronde Tribal Police Department and we are proud of our Police Officers, Chief, and our department. As such we know first-hand the costs of operating this important public safety function and we are sensitive to the difficulties Polk County has in providing stable revenues for its law enforcement operations. The Tribal Council supports the concept of Polk County providing new revenue for the rebuilding of your law enforcement capacity. Your proposal to offer to voters a new operating levy of an additional \$0.45/\$1,000 assessed value for 5 years will provide a critical important boost to the Sheriff’s office and County law enforcement. Our Tribe and the community of Grand Ronde, and Polk County as a whole, would benefit from increased law enforcement and jail coverage that would result from the substantial new revenue (generated from this levy). New tax levies are difficult. We encourage you to take the time, work with your constituents, and not hurry to a new ballot. Education is a critical component to these ballot measures. On behalf of the tribal Council, we offer our assistance if we can be of any help in any way.”

Annie Fala, the Sexual and Domestic Violence Program Coordinator for the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde (but also serves the entire community) testified that approximately one in three tribal females will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime, and are more likely to have these assaults happen more than once. However, she is being told by her clients that when they call 911 that there are no patrols available to respond. No one comes to help. As an advocate, this cannot happen. The Sheriff’s department in most instances is the only ‘safety net’ these women have. Ms. Fala tells her clients that if they need help to call 911 but when there are no patrols there is no one to help. Ms. Fala encouraged the Board to move forward with this levy because the community needs these patrols to get a response when these assaults happen, and the District Attorney’s office needs increased staff to be able to create a Sexual Assault Response Team and be able to better follow-up on these cases. District Attorney Felton and Sheriff Wolfe echoed Ms. Fala’s heartbreak and frustration of not being able to help the most vulnerable victims in our community.

Michelle Fink, 8430 AR Ford Rd., Grand Ronde, OR 97347, testified that according to Zillow.com, property values in the Grand Ronde area have declined by 12%. Ms. Fink attributes part of this decline to people living in the community that do not do the maintenance and upkeep of their properties. Ms. Fink have been trying to work with the neighbors and county Code Enforcement to clean up the community and try to raise property values back up. Ms. Fink plans on continuing to stand up to other property owners to get the issues resolved and requested assistance from the tribe to help with this also.

Russ Knoll, 1920 Oak Grove Road in West Salem testified that the levy will equate to approximately \$0.25 per day, which is not that much. 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.

Commissioner Pope noted that this is the fourth Public Hearing that the County has held, and the turnout has been very small. The Board has also not had any member of the community come forward to contribute to the PAC that will be required to manage the campaign for this levy

happen. The County cannot manage the campaign, because no tax dollars can be used to run a campaign. The County needs citizen-based involvement and encouraged the citizens in attendance to spread the word about the meetings and continue to be involved in this discussion.

Commissioner Pope also reported that he had spent most of the day in Eugene at meetings with the Bureau of Land Management, to discuss a new resource management plan. The new Congress has promised that there will be changes in land and forest management and the O&C counties are hopeful of a return of some SRS payments. The Board continues to work at the legislative level for more sustainable funding through a return of a Natural Resources Management Plan. Craig explained that if this levy does pass, and the County receives additional timber monies, then the County would simply levy less to offset the timber revenue.

3. ADJOURN

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

Hearing no further business, Commissioner Ainsworth adjourned the meeting at 6:57 p.m.

POLK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Mike Ainsworth, Chair

Jennifer Wheeler, Commissioner

Craig Pope, Commissioner

Minutes: Heather Merrill
Approved: January 21, 2015