

**POLK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**Minutes of January 21, 2015**  
**Monmouth Public Library, 168 Ecols St. SE, Monmouth, OR 97361**

**1. CALL TO ORDER & ATTENDANCE**

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

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

**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 sixth 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, due to the loss of federal timber payments, an increase in non-county controlled benefit costs, and stagnant property taxes, 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 fund 22 FTE: 12 in Sheriff-Patrol, 5 in Sheriff-Jail, 5 in District Attorney-Prosecution, and also fund the rental of 2 additional Juvenile detention beds.

Sheriff Wolfe explained that within the city limits, the Polk County Public Safety Departments performs many functions: when a municipal police agency arrests a suspected criminal, they are lodged and handed off to the Polk County jail, which is operated under the Sheriff's office. Once in the jail, the inmate is charged with a crime and directed to circuit court, which means that their case is tried by the Polk County District Attorney's office, in a courtroom that is supposed to have security provided by the Sheriff's office. If convicted, this offender then goes into the Polk County Community Corrections caseload, where they are supervised by a Parole Officer. Many responsibilities of the Sheriff's office cannot be performed by State and Municipal police agencies by law: some of these include entering and serving restraining orders and property and money seizures. The Sheriff's office also provides a back up for the Municipal police departments, who's departments are also feeling the negative effects of the County public safety cuts.

Sheriff Wolfe went onto explain that 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 (10-hr per day patrols since March 29, 2014), 1,500 calls so far this year that have been taken without a patrol response, minimum staffing in the jail (resulting in \$79,000 in overtime expenses so far in this fiscal year), and the deactivation of POINT (County drug enforcement and investigations). The Sheriff's office has also seen a 34% drop in overall arrests, a 47% drop in DUII 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.

Commissioner Ainsworth opened the Public Hearing.

Steve Milligan, 266 Clay St. West, Monmouth, and a Monmouth City Councilman, testified that he is in favor of the levy, and offered to help with the campaign work. Mr. Milligan feels it is in the best interest of the citizens of the County to go out for the levy this May. The challenges that the county will face to pass the levy in the spring will be far less than the leadership challenges that the Board will face if they wait to go out for the levy. The lack of law enforcement causes problems not only for the County, but also for those trying to manage and run other cities. Mr. Milligan understands that resources are stretched, but the longer we wait, at some point the system will break.

Mr. Milligan also requested that the Board exercise the same passion and drive for this levy that the late Mike Propes showed for the \$20 million road bond that was passed in 2006. He didn't sit idly by and expect the citizens to pass the bond. At some point, the Commissioners have to show the rest of the county that regardless of their personal ideology of taxes, they are aggressively tax supportive. The people that elected the Commissioners understood that this hard decision would have to be made, and the same voters who voted for the Commissioners will back the Commissioners when they show the courage and the leadership skills to make this cup full again. The Board needs to step up and ask the citizens who publicly support the levy to work with them instead of waiting for citizens and help to approach them. The only way the citizens will be successful in getting the levy passed, is if the Board shows that they have the political will to make it happen.

Toby McClary, 793 Sitka Deer Ct. NW, Salem, and a Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Tribal Council Member, testified that as a Polk County homeowner, he is in support of the levy to provide additional resources for public safety. His taxes will increase by approximately \$100 per year, which he feels is a minimal price to pay for peace of mind and to avoid the long-term effects of reduced law-enforcement coverage. Mr. McClary also read a prepared statement from the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde:

"The Tribal Government provides our own Grand Ronde Tribal Police Department and know first-hand the costs of operating important public safety programs and we are sensitive to the difficulties Polk County has in providing stable revenues for such functions. The Tribal Council supports the concept of Polk County providing new revenue for the rebuilding of your public safety capacity. Our Tribe and the community of Grand Ronde, and Polk County as a whole, would benefit from increased law enforcement and jail coverage. New tax levies are difficult. We encourage you to take the time, work with your constituents, and not rush a new ballot. Education is a critical component to any new ballot measure. On behalf of the tribal Council, we offer our help if we can be of any assistance in any way."

Pamela Venegas, 11360 Church St, Buena Vista, testified that she is not in support of the levy. Recently, the County Parks Department received a grant to pave the Buena Vista Park, knowing that there were no law enforcement coverage to patrol the park. Now, there is increased drug transactions in the park. Also, Ms. Venegas struggles with where she would find room in her budget to pay the increased taxes. Ms. Venegas expressed her frustration with the Sheriff's Office in publicly releasing the hours of patrol coverage. Sheriff Wolfe responded that citizens deserve to know that there will be a delay or no response after hours if a call is placed.

Dan Daberkow, 480 Crater Dr., Monmouth, testified that he hears concerns from people in

financial stress still since the economic collapse of 2008. Mr. Daberkow thinks that it might be more palatable to the community to have a trade-off: if the county increases public safety funds, other County funds or departments should be cut. Greg Hansen explained that every other department in the General Fund (Assessor, Tax/Treasurer, Clerk, Community Development) have also been cut to minimum staffing, however, because the Sheriff's office is the largest part of the General fund, it takes the most cuts. Other departments within the County (Public Works, Health Services) receive state and federal dedicated funding, which cannot be used for anything other than those programs. Some of the programs outside the General Fund continue to grow in FTE because their funding streams continue to grow, but the general fund stream has been cut by the loss of federal timber funds, resulting in cuts to the departments that are within the general fund.

Francis Ford, 295 Park Place S., Monmouth, testified that when she bought her house in 2008 in Monmouth the taxes were \$1,800, now they're \$3,400. Ms. Ford stressed that the Board needs to understand that families are on budgets and fixed incomes. The Commissioners have tough jobs to find an answer but doesn't think the levy is the solution and wants the County to find another way besides increasing taxes to fund the public safety programs.

Rose Dorn, 1840 Sterlency Dr., Monmouth, asked about how much money the County receives from the sale of foreclosed homes. Greg Hansen explained that there are very few houses that get tax foreclosed (approximately 1 every 5-7 years). On these sales, the county receives about \$0.14/\$1.00, the rest gets divided amongst all of the other taxing districts. Ms. Dorn feels that every time the city, county, or state, wants money, it is the property owners who are asked to provide it versus a sales tax where everyone can share the burden. Ms. Dorn feels that property tax is a 'plank' of communist manifesto and Agenda 21: Government Conspiracies to implement Soviet/Communist style philosophies and kick people out of their homes.

Marshall Guthrie, 1631 Teton, Monmouth, asked about how much money the County would receive from the legalization of marijuana. Sheriff Wolfe explained that the Marijuana legalization law does state that a portion would go towards state, county and city law enforcement, but the amounts are not known at this time. However, whatever amount is received will not make up the \$2.4 million dollar shortfall that the County is facing. Aaron Felton also mentioned that he anticipates that there will be increased costs to his department from the legalization of marijuana (increased DUI cases), that will offset any revenue that is received. Mr. Guthrie asked if there are any other revenue generating tools that the County has at their disposal that could be used instead of raising property taxes? Greg Hansen explained that counties are very limited on what they can do to generate revenue, most revenue sources are a property tax of some sort. Another option would be to form a law enforcement district, which is a brand new form of government and would require a permanent tax rate. Mr. Guthrie also asked if there was a way to structure a property tax that takes into account not just the value of the property but the household size and income as well? Greg Hansen answered that was not possible. Mr. Guthrie then asked what happens after this five year levy expires? Greg Hansen responded that if no permanent solution is found, then most likely the County will attempt to pass another levy at that time. The Board continues to work with the legislature to find a congressional fix that will return some of the funding for natural resources management of the federal timber lands in this county.

Don Dutcher, 500 College St., Monmouth, testified that he is on a fixed income, but listening to the problems that the County is facing, there is no choice but to put the measure on the ballot. Mr. Dutcher expressed frustration that for years the County has been whining about timber money being reduced for years but never looked to other revenue sources before this point. Mr. Dutcher

also would like to see the civil duties and responsibility that are required of the sheriff be redistributed to municipal agencies too.

John Westfall, Rolling Hills Rd., Monmouth, asked about the details about forming a taxing district or raising the permanent tax rate. Greg explained how a taxing district would be formed and funded with a permanent tax rate by popular vote. All city and county permanent tax rates were set by Measure 47. Polk County's permanent tax rate is \$1.71/\$1,000 assessed value and cannot be changed. To generate revenue, cities and counties can go before voters to pass bonds (for capital improvements) or operating levies: both have expiration dates. Mr. Westfall testified that he feels like for the amount that he would be paying for the levy is a good deal for the services that he would be receiving and would like to see an aggressive campaign to get the levy passed.

Patty Dutcher, 500 College St., Monmouth, testified that they retired to Monmouth 18 years ago and are active volunteers in the community. The best thing the County can do is to move forward with the levy and put their money where their mouth is.

Judge Horner asked District Attorney Aaron Felton to explain what his office would be able to do if the levy were passed. Aaron Felton explained that the Polk County District Attorney's office has the smallest staff per capita of any other office in the State. It is the job of this office to hold people accountable for the crimes they commit. At current staffing levels, this is very difficult. This levy would provide three additional criminal prosecutors and two additional support staff. One prosecutor would become a full-time juvenile prosecutor for juvenile dependency and child abuse cases, one prosecutor would be a full-time drug and addictions, property crimes and financial fraud prosecutor that would also work with the drug enforcement team in the county, and the third prosecutor will be used for measure-11 violent crimes. Each case takes a significant amount of time, and the office is only doing triage on these cases. Additional prosecutors will provide the necessary time and effort to follow through on cases effectively. Marty Silbernagel added that the Community Correction's funding is based on the number of felons supervised; when felonies aren't being arrested or prosecuted, this impacts the Community Corrections department.

Russ Noll, 1920 Oak Grove Rd., Salem, testified that there are three Commissioners, and 76,000 residents in Polk County. There needs to be citizen involvement. Mr. Noll volunteered to be one of these citizens and encouraged others to also help out.

Commissioner Ainsworth explained that the public safety system is like a school district in the sense that even if you don't have children, you are still paying taxes to the school district because it is for the good of the community. However, everyone will benefit from the increase in public safety by being able to feel safe in their homes.

### **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 7:25 p.m.

**POLK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

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Mike Ainsworth, Chair

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Jennifer Wheeler, Commissioner

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Craig Pope, Commissioner

Minutes: Heather Merrill  
Approved: January 28, 2015