

POLK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Minutes of January 22, 2015

Chemeketa Viticulture Center, 215 Doaks Ferry Rd NW, Salem, OR 97304

1. CALL TO ORDER & ATTENDANCE

At 6:04 p.m., Commissioner Ainsworth called the meeting of the Polk County Board of Commissioners to be in session. Commissioner Wheeler was present, Commissioner Pope was excused.

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, and minimum staffing in the jail (resulting in \$79,000 in overtime expenses so far in this fiscal year). These cuts have also resulted in the elimination of the Sheriff's involvement in following programs: POINT (County drug enforcement and investigations), Forestry Patrol, DUI Enforcement and Seatbelt Grants, Special Response Tactical Team, Computer Forensics Deputy, Crash Reconstruction Technical Assistant, Dumpstoppers Program, Prescription Drug Tack Back

Program, Neighborhood Watch and National Night Out 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.

Lowell Ford, 2450 Wallace Rd., Salem, testified that he is not only concerned with his personal safety as a result of the cuts to the Polk County public safety system, but as the owner of a farm and vineyard in the County, he is concerned of the impact of crime on rural businesses. Mr. Ford also testified that In the last Commissioner election, he did not vote for the incumbent because he has felt that the Commissioners have been negligent, and hopes that the public safety issue would become a high priority for the elected officials. Mr. Ford also shared an observation that he read in the Statesman Journal: the timber funds for the State of Oregon have fallen from \$67.9 million to \$5.9 million, but the Fenders Blue Butterfly received funding of \$22 million, which is just difficult for him to understand how government can prioritize a butterfly over public schools and public safety.

Lisa Mitchell, Bethel Road, Amity, testified that she is speaking from two different perspectives: a victim and a first responder. Ms. Mitchell shared her story from last July hen she became a victim of domestic violence that escalated and resulted in her home being destroyed by a fire, and was told by the dispatcher that "there is no one we can send." As a first responder, Ms. Mitchell responds to fire, medical and motor vehicle accidents, and explained that a quick, timely response to an emergency situation is critical and increased the likelihood of a more positive outcome. Having law enforcement to be first responders necessary to ensure that there will be a safe outcome not just for the patients, but also the first responders. Ms. Mitchell stressed that not passing a levy is a life or death situation.

Glen Stonebrink, lives on Rickreall Rd. and owns three residences in the County and is also the owner of Farroll's Restaurant and Eola Hills Rock 'N Rogers. He testified that he does not like the idea of raising property taxes, but since he has never been to a budget meeting and doesn't know how the County spends their money, then has no objections to paying more in taxes. Within the last month, Mr. Stonebrink has had multiple break-ins in customers and employees cars, and doesn't get a response from the Sheriff's office until noon the next day. Mr. Stonebrink also commented that without additional patrols, there is no way to control speeders on the Highway 22 corridor. Mr. Stonebrink said that he would like to see other revenue generating options besides just raising taxes, but understands that the County is limited it what they can do.

Gene Henshaw, 2424 Oakwood Dr., Dallas, testified that he has volunteered for the County and can attest that the Sheriff's department is ran very efficiently and professionally. Mr. Henshaw also commented that if the campaign moves forward the PAC would need to hit the ground running. There is a huge amount of voters who are apathetic, and that is who the campaign needs to reach.

Anna Peterson, Mayor of Salem, 471 High St SE, Salem, and the Mayor of Salem testified that she is absolutely in support of moving forward on the levy. Mayor Peterson is appreciative of how well the county works with the City Police, and hopes that the relationship continues to be successful. Mayor Peterson has not brought the issue before the City Council, so she cannot speak on behalf of them, but now that she has the handouts and more information she plans to present it and get a recommendation from the Council.

Rod Buchanan, 1335 Reuben Boise Rd., Dallas, testified that recently someone broke the window of his car, and the deductible that he had to pay was \$250. \$90 per year (approximately \$0.25/day) is worth the cost to prevent these type of crimes from ever happening in the first place. Mr. Buchanan explained that there are tragedies like Ms. Mitchell's that we don't hear about, and it is the citizen's job to push this levy, spread the information and help increase awareness and knowledge to other voters.

E.M. Easterly, 775 Fir Gardens St. NW, Salem, OR 97304, urged the Commissioners to go out for the levy in May, 2015. Waiting longer means the funds won't be available until FY 16-17 at the earliest. In November 2013, 62% of the voters did not even cast a vote. Mr. Easterly explained that too few voters have heard the message, and don't understand that the services that are supported through this levy affect the whole county, including those inside city limits. Mr. Easterly never wants his family or friends to be in need of help and be told that no one is available. But it is happening. Mr. Easterly is ready and willing to help, and emphasized that if the County does not even try in May, than it is guaranteed not to get better.

Russ Noll, 1920 Oak Grove Rd., Salem, testified that first responders go into dangerous situations and currently have no backup, putting themselves in unnecessary risk. Mr. Noll encouraged the citizens in attendance to contact their friends and family in Polk County and explain the situation and encourage them to attend the remaining meetings and help out with the campaign.

Commissioner Wheeler explained that throughout these public hearings, there have been a couple stories that have really bothered her, both about victims calling for help and being told that no one is available to respond. Commissioner Wheeler apologized for the victims and those people that do not get an answer when they call for help. The County needs to do our best to keep women, children and elderly safe. Commissioner Wheeler feels that is irresponsible to not move forward on the levy.

Sheriff Wolfe also explained that his daughter is a dispatcher for the Willamette Valley 9-1-1 operations center, and the dispatchers receive verbal abuse every night when they have to tell callers that there is no one available to respond. The victims are not the only ones that feel helpless and heartbroken when there is no law enforcement available to help.

District Attorney Felton commented that every member of the Public Safety team does their part to hold offenders accountable in different ways. The District Attorney's office has a unique role: when an offender is arrested, it is the DA's job to keep them in jail, and if severe enough, to put them in prison. However, the office needs more help to get this job done. There is not enough staff to keep up.

Commissioner Ainsworth commented that the testimony heard tonight is sobering. The most vulnerable people in the community, the ones calling for help, are the ones that are being affected the most by the lack of public safety in the County.

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 7:15 p.m.

POLK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Mike Ainsworth, Chair

Jennifer Wheeler, Commissioner

Craig Pope, Commissioner

Minutes: Heather Merrill
Approved: January 28, 2015