

**IN THE COUNTY COURT OF THE STATE OF OREGON
IN AND FOR THE COUNTY OF GRANT**

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May 18, 2022 – Regular Meeting of the County Court

Pursuant to notice made to the newspaper of general circulation throughout Grant County, the radio station, county website, and e-mail distribution list, a regular meeting of the County Court was held at the County Courthouse in Canyon City, OR.

9:03 am -- Call to Order. Present were Judge Scott W. Myers, Commissioners Jim Hamsher and Sam Palmer, Administrative Assistant Laurie Stinnett, Reporter Steven Mitchell, John Day Rural Fire District Chairman Eric Julsrud, Natural Resource Advisory Committee (NRAC) members Billie Jo George and Thom Seal, PhD, PE, QP; Community Members John Rowell, Louis Provencher, Charlene Morris and Judy Kerr. A Pledge of Allegiance was given to the United States Flag. The invocation was given by Kelly Workman.

AGENDA. MSP: Myers/Hamsher -- to accept the agenda as presented with the addition of Item H: request for approval to annex six properties into the John Day Rural Fire District.

ANNOUNCEMENTS. Judge Scott Myers attended a Road Advisory meeting on Thursday, an Airport Advisory Committee meeting on the 9th, a Surplus Sale bidding at the Road Department on the 10th, a Mental Health Advisory Committee meeting at Community Connections at 10:30, a Budget Meeting on the 11th, a phone call with Eastern Oregon Counties Association (EOCA) water committee on the 12th, and a McRae Scholarship Committee meeting on the 16th. In addition, Myers performed hangar inspections with Airport Manager Hayley Walker on the 17th, the County Court meeting on the 18th, Extension District Budget hearing at 1 pm and the County Budget meeting at 2pm. He will meet with the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) local board on May 20th.

Commissioner Sam Palmer attended the Budget Committee Meeting and carried out follow-up with department heads, the Treasurer and Roadmaster.

Commissioner Jim Hamsher attended a National Association of Counties (NACO) Veterans meeting, obtained information about assistance with internet bills for lower income people, visited with Representative Cliff Bentz' staff by phone, Oregon Fish and Wildlife Services about wolf issues by phone, took part in a NACo Public Lands Steering Committee Public Lands meeting by phone, met with various department heads, took part in a White House briefing call, spoke with a county resident about the budget and spoke with the District Attorney (DA) and with various department heads. Hamsher also spoke with Senators Merkley and Wyden about funding "coming down the pike."

MINUTES. The minutes of May 4th, 2022 were reviewed.

MSP: Hamsher/Myers – to approve the minutes of May 4th, 2022 as presented.

ANNEXATION. Eris Julsrud confirmed that six property owners are requesting annexation into the Rural Fire District for protection of structures not covered by the Oregon Department of Forestry, who protects timbered property but not structures. The annexation has been approved by the Oregon Department of Forestry and the John Day Rural Fire District.

MSP: Hamsher/Palmer - to approve the annexation of six Canyon Creek properties into the Rural Fire District.

RESOLUTION 22-15. Treasurer Julie Ellison requested an intrafund transfer of \$2500 from Materials and Services to Personnel in order to cover the pay raise for Senior Center cooks, as previously approved by the Court.

MSP: Myers/Hamsher - to approve Resolution 22-15 and circulate for signature.

MAP MAINTENANCE. The Assessor’s office submitted an agreement between the Oregon Department of Revenue (ODR) and Grant County for map maintenance and related cartographic activities at an estimate of \$10,000.

MSP: Myers/Palmer - to approve the agreement for map maintenance performed by ODR as presented.

9: 15 am Didgette McCracken entered

9:17am Logan Baggett entered

Tory Stinnett entered

SENECA CYBERMILL UPDATE. Open Campus Coordinator Didgette McCracken brought an update for the Court. The Seneca CyberMill is a nonprofit entity. It has been open since November 16th, 2021. McCracken shared that they currently have 125 members; 48 from Seneca, 17 from John Day and 38 from other zip codes. Membership is free; members are given an access code to enter the building. They have logged 280 entries into the building every month, averaging nine entries per day. They have a back room for meeting space with a screen, microphone and camera; this can be reserved online and has been booked 44 times. It has been used to work with Senior Service and Behavioral Health clients, as well as distance education, fire, high school and college classes. Seventy-five users cite the use of access for work, 26 as entrepreneurs and 45 for educational purposes. The facility has been used for FAFSA applications, scholarship interviews, homework, and scholarship applications. Others go to access the broadband for gaming or to update their devices. There are plans for a CyberMill in Prairie City. The location and the first year’s start-up funds are secured. Louis Provencher asked if there is any consideration of partnering with the library. Myers asked what will happen when high-speed internet is available to households. Tory Stinnett commented on the number of cars seen when driving by. McCracken said they just missed hunting season and had hunters exiting who stopped to ask about the use of the facility next year.

9:45 am Craig Truelock, Lisa Galbreath, Dan Armichardy and Denine Schmitz entered

NATURAL RESOURCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE UPDATE. Natural Resource Advisory Committee (NRAC) board member Thom Seal, PHD, PE, QP, Professor of Mining, shared that an infrastructure bill passed last fall contained state and federal funding for the use of an Earth MRI to look for critical and strategic metals across the United States. Seal stated that 16 of the 35 critical metals are found in the Blue Mountains. NRAC passed a motion in the last meeting to advise the county of the importance of developing mines and mineral maps, and is unanimous in support of the county taking an active role in that. He noted that it takes about ten years to actually begin moving earth because of the environmental laws, compliance and permits. After that, it is one of the highest paying jobs around, and can also contribute a significant boost to the local service industry. He acknowledged that it is a long-term “sort of thing” but feels that chrome and cobalt here could prove economically beneficial to the county. Seal noted that China currently has a lot of rare earth metal mining; if we get into a critical situation we will need a “homegrown operation”. He offered the use of the letter to the Court with the ability to edit it as they choose.

9:55 am Kathy Stinnett entered

A second topic addressed by NRAC is their desire to see the court recognize the 2477 roads within the county. NRAC member Billie Jo George addressed the current plans for Deep Creek Road. The decommissioning of 1.5 miles of road to mitigate flooding was part of the Big Mosquito Peak decision in 2015. Objections to this proposal include the resulting longer route to get cell service. Billie Jo George stated that there is nothing wrong with the road and that areas of Chinese tailings in the area would be obliterated. Hydrologist Denine Schmitz said the tailings have been flagged for avoidance. Trulock said there would be no changes to the grazing permits in the area. He stated that the Forest Service doesn’t have the authority to recognize a 24-77 road and that the Court has to make that claim. Concern about the road closure hindering access to fire-fighting was expressed, as well as that continued road closures would have citizens relegated to the highways. Mining claims could still be worked, but miners would be required to restore the area when finished. Judy Kerr and Thom Seal both expressed dismay at the lack of Forest Service acknowledgement of the 2477 roads.

10:15 am David Thunell, Julie Ellison, Laurie Cates, Kimberly Neault, Todd McKinley, Brenda Percy, Brooke Griffith, Trista Strong, Kaylie Clark and Jim Carpenter entered

PROPOSED BUDGET CUTS. In response to the \$800,000 miscalculation in the County budget, the Court has been asked by the Budget Committee members to recommend potential budget cuts. Commissioner Hamsher began by asking that departments look at their budgets and determine if there are cuts that could be made. Commissioner Palmer noted that a \$1000 cut in each department wouldn’t be enough. Economic Development Director Tory Stinnett shared that she has currently eliminated \$17,000 from her budget. Myers noted that the County has funded much of the Seniors Programs. Hamsher stated that if we change the way we receive our Title II and III funds, it could bring in

an additional \$200,000 to \$225,000 per year.

Treasurer Julie Ellison passed out copies of potential budget cuts, including four-hour or eight-hour cuts across the board, excluding the Sheriff and Road Departments and the figures for cutting non-mandated departments. Reducing the forty hour work week to thirty-six hours would save the County \$145,000 annually, while a thirty-two hour work week would save \$289,000.

Myers noted that not all departments have the ability to generate funds, such as the airport does with fuel sales, and questioned whether it was fair to cut departments without that capability. Justice of the Peace Kathy Stinnett stated that dollars are not a good way to put a value on a department.

With her experience in handling grant funding, Tory was asked if her department might be able to assist the Fairgrounds in managing the \$2 million they will be receiving; she agreed that would be possible. She commented on the budget issues, commenting that it was important to look at not just immediate reactions to the problem, but where the problem is coming from.

Julie Ellison stated that the county pays \$40,000 per month in PERS liability; that number was \$16,000 when she began working here. Former budget committee member Eva Harris stated that when she was involved in former years, they operated primarily with ORS-mandated services. She said there may be services that the public likes, but cannot afford, that could be brought back later. Mandated positions include the Court, Clerk, Treasurer, Assessor and Sheriff. Non-mandated positions include Janitor, Maintenance Department, Library, Economic Development, Justice of the Peace, Librarian, Human Resources and Emergency Management.

Jim Carpenter said that he has operated on a budget for both his home and formerly-owned private business. He said that he is not confident that the county can tell us the numbers of the actual budget, in which case, it is irresponsible to make cuts. Carpenter said, "If you don't know where you are, you can't know where you are going." He noted that when you make cuts to these departments you make cuts to services. He feels that the first thing to go should be the stipends.

Eva Harris said that she would like to think that every single month the Court sees the balance statement that shows the actual income, expenses and potential income. She reiterated that a hard copy of the budget should be presented monthly to all involved in order to make appropriate decisions. Treasurer Julie Ellison advised she used to provide a revenue and expense report to the Court monthly; due to the volume of the report, she was asked to keep a copy in her office for the Court members to review at any time.

Legal Assistant Trista Strong said she was highly frustrated that for two years in a row we are being asked to cut hours, budgets or positions. Watermaster Eric Julsrud shared that he lost his employee last year because she saw the writing on the wall. Assessor David Thunell stated that

he was asked to cut his budget last year and has nothing left to cut again. Various comments included the following: *We are in a place of crisis mode; we need to start looking ahead so we will not be in this crisis mode again; instead of just cutting back, we need to have a plan moving forward.*

Sheriff McKinley admits his department is the worst offender. In his words, they take in nothing and spend a lot. Discussion followed about the cost of running the jail. McKinley said that the state no longer wants to incarcerate offenders and he does not expect there to be any increase in revenue from housing inmates. He expressed frustration with the budget system and his department's budgeting demands.

Emergency Management Coordinator Eric Bush said he appreciates the challenge the court is facing. He cautioned the Court, reporting that one of the figures is off by \$24,000. If he was cut to 32 hours, saving \$12,000 in wages and benefits, the decrease would cost the County \$21,000 in funding. This would create a net loss for the County of just under \$10,000. Bush stated that the first time he knew about the budget issue was reading it in the paper. He feels there is a communication and work-flow piece that is missing. Bush said, "We need to look at the way we do business and define objectives for the county. We're tripping over dollars to pick up pennies."

STATE OF OREGON AND GRANT COUNTY BI-ANNUAL CORRECTIONS AGREEMENT.

MSP:Myers/Hamsher— to approve the agreement as presented and circulate for signature.

PERMIT FEE WAIVER. Emergency Management Coordinator Eric Bush asked the Court to waive the permit fee for the old county shop remodel. 90% of the permit fee goes to the state of Oregon, and 10% remains in the County. It does not cost us anything for the permits if we waive them. If the Court approves this request, the county will have \$1800 in additional American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to spend at their discretion.

MSP: Hamsher/Palmer – to approve the waiver of the permit fee.

11:40 Adjourned

Respectfully Submitted,

Laurie Stinnett
Administrative Assistant

****** Please note the court minutes are a summary of the court proceedings. An audio recording of each court session is available, after approval of the minutes, by contacting the County Court at 541-575-0059 or GCCourtAdmin@grantcounty-or.gov ******