

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

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**August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023 – 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.

**CALL TO ORDER.** The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. Present were Judge Scott W. Myers, Commissioner Jim Hamsher, Commissioner John Rowell, Administrative Assistant Laurie Stinnett, Reporter Neil Nisperos, Ellen Bush, Earl Bush, Eric Bush, Sara Bush, Heather Rookstool, Judy Kerr, Sandy Gilson, Frances Preston, Billie Jo George, Rick Minster, Shelley Wyllie, Jim Spell, Gary Miller, Adele Cerny, Susan Church, Kathy Stinnett, Jamie McKay, Trista Strong, Jim Carpenter, Todd McKinley and Jim Bay.

**HAND CHECKS.** The Court approved outside of normal claims day, check #s 65778, 67057, 67058, 67061, 67092.

**AGENDA.** Review of the agenda for August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023.

MSP: Hamsher/Myers -- to approve the agenda as presented. Ayes: Myers, Hamsher, Rowell.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

JUDGE MYERS 7/20 Met with DEQ; 7/26 called in to Association of Oregon Counties (AOC) meeting with a 4:30 Board of Directors meeting; 7/28 performed a wedding. UPCOMING: 8/3 wedding scheduled.

COMMISSIONER HAMSHER Local Government Advisory Committee meeting for Health and Human Services, LCDC; Local Officials Advisory Committee meeting; South East Area Transportation Committee meeting; AOC Public Safety Committee meeting; a bill signing of SB 955 with the Governor, Senator Findley, Representative Owens, Senator Hanzel, Representative Levy & Dr. Allison Myers from OSU; Grant County mayors meeting.

COMMISSIONER ROWELL 7/19 Attended the Blue Mtn. Eagle Meet & Greet featuring their new office remodel and the staff; 7/20 Attended a regular meeting of the Blue Mountain Forest Partners.

**COUNTY FAIR BEER GARDEN CONTRACTS.** The Court reviewed two service contracts for the beer garden suppliers at the Grant County Fair & Rodeo.

MSP: Myers/Hamsher – to approve the contract for the dates of August 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> with the Grant County Stockgrowers Association as presented. Ayes: Myers, Hamsher, Rowell.

MSP: Myers/Hamsher – to approve the contract for the dates of August 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, & 11<sup>th</sup> with the

Snaffle Bit as presented. Ayes: Myers, Hamsher, Rowell.

**PLANNING DEPARTMENT GRANT REQUEST.** The Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) Grant Young Memorial Grant is being offered to Grant County in the amount of \$5000. Shannon Springer, Planning Director, recommends that the court accept this grant offer and enter into the agreement for these funds, which have a broad range of uses, including salaries for staff time spent administering the planning program in the county. The signed offer must be returned before August 31, 2023.

MSP: Myers/Rowell – to approve the \$5000 DLCD Grant Young Memorial grant as presented. Ayes: Myers, Hamsher, Rowell.

**SPECIAL MEETING: MOVE OREGON’S BORDERS/ GREATER IDAHO.**

Referendum Petition No. 12-77 requires the Grant County Court to meet on the first Wednesday of every April, August and December to discuss whether it is in the best interests of Grant County to promote the relocation of the Oregon-Idaho border such that Grant County would become part of the State of Idaho.

Judge Myers opened the discussion, allowing those in opposition of the movement to be the first to speak. Shelley Wyllie shared her opposition. Among her concerns were that Idaho was ill-prepared to accommodate this event. Eva Harris does not understand the Court’s “neutral” position on the issue and expressed her disappointment in the Court issued letter, which turned the matter over to the state legislature. She would like to see the Court take a stand and represent the best interests of the county in opposing the movement. Adele Cerny, Bear Valley, shared an analogy as an educator: if you don’t like the way things are going on the playground, you pick up your ball and go home. She contrasted that example with the many positive things happening in Grant County through collaboration. Rick Minster said Idaho ranked last in 2022 in educational funding, citing \$8000 to Oregon’s \$12,000 per student; if we’re really interested in improving our economy, we must pay attention to education. He asked if the court has researched the economic impacts on the county, with the operation of the Idaho road departments and funding as an example. Sandie Gilson, a member of the leadership team for the Greater Idaho movement, said that studies have been done to determine benefits of the proposed movement. Gilson said that Oregon’s regulations stifle growth; in the event of a move to Idaho, the study predicts 2% economic growth. She cited a US News report that ranks Idaho as 22<sup>nd</sup> and Oregon as 27<sup>th</sup> in education. The study also ranks Idaho as the third best state to live in. She said they have taken their time to meet with leaders and are scheduled to be at an upcoming Democratic event in Sunriver and a Republican event in Pendleton. She said that while they are doing their due diligence, they are not finding people in the government to join with. The upcoming legislation reflects the eastern/western divide. She is a 5<sup>th</sup> generation Oregonian who is no longer represented by the state government. We need our issues looked at. She stated that Democratic leaders are refusing to listen and are not collaborative. Judy Kerr expressed doubts about the quality of education in Oregon. Gilson, a business owner, can’t hire people who can read cursive, but has been told by the state that she can hire a tutor for them. Jim Bay challenged Gilson’s statistics through the Claremont Institute. Judge Myers noted that many

data-gathering companies on both sides have their own agendas. Bay warned attendees to beware of de-regulation, statistics and polls. Shelley Wyllie submitted a statement for the records.

Entered -- Eric Bush, Wade Waddell, Josh Wolf, Sheriff McKinley

**DISSOLUTION OF JUSTICE COURT (CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS COURT MEETING).**

Judge Myers and Commissioner Hamsher were asked by Commissioner Rowell to delineate their support of Justice Court. Listed were service to county citizens; a swifter resolution to some judicial matters; an in and out atmosphere not delayed by other court trials that may take weeks. Myers noted that the Justice Court budget was not an insurmountable amount for the county to support, adding that while we have budget issues, Justice Court should not be a player in those issues. He reiterated that that's not a big enough burden to save our budget. Hamsher agreed with the Justice Court being an important service to the public. He noted that we presently have 4 million dollars making 4.3 percent interest which should generate almost \$190,000 this year alone. The Road Service dollars will bring in a yearly \$250,000; we brought in an additional \$70,000 in Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) last year. We need to work with our Senators and Congress for changes in Title III funding to increase revenue, which could happen in this fiscal year, benefitting all of Eastern Oregon. Myers asked Rowell to answer the same question he presented to Myers and Hamsher. Rowell replied that he has been working to determine how important our Justice Court is to our citizens. He questions how we provide these services, within our budget, responsibly. District Attorney Jim Carpenter asked Judge Myers to read his letter in support of Justice Court. Carpenter said that Justice Court has value and should be retained. While Circuit Court may be willing and may advocate to take on these duties, there are reasons that the Justice Court has his support. The Circuit Court involves more red tape and does not have the same level of local accountability as the Justice Court. He noted that circuit court days can be crowded and may be intimidating to attendees. It carries a certain degree of formality and is more process-driven. Sheriff Todd McKinley also stated his support for Justice Court with the example of his own encounter as a misguided youth facing an appearance in court related to a driving event. His Justice Court experience was different than he would have had in Circuit Court. As Sheriff, he is currently a beneficiary of Justice Court services, describing it as a good catch-all for smaller things that could turn into bigger things. Mayor Heather Rookstool appreciates the timely handling of issues involving the John Day city code enforcement. The Justice Court has agreements with most of the cities to provide, at no cost, services to address code enforcement. Justice of the Peace Kathy Stinnett noted that although \$100,000 is the budgeted amount for her department, the court also brings in revenue which makes the actual amount spent on the department less than that. Circuit Court costs more in filing fees and more in taxpayer dollars to support. She closed by asking the court to make a decision today so they can get back to their jobs.

Rowell moved the motion back to the table and then motioned to remove it from the table. He thanked everyone for their input and patience with him, and expressed appreciation for the process. He acknowledged the testimony of advocates, calling the Justice Court a much-needed

thing within our community. Hamsher thanked Rowell for reconsidering and for listening to folks. Myers thanked everyone for their participation and input.

**MINUTES.** Review the past county court meeting minutes, below.

MSP: Myers/Palmer -- to approve the minutes of June 21<sup>st</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, July 5<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> as presented.

**COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS BIENNIAL PLAN 2023-25.**

Sergeant Josh Wolf requested the Court's approval, which has already been approved by the Local Public Safety Coordinating Committee (LPSCC).

MSP: Myers/Hamsher- to approve the Community Corrections Biennial Plan for 2023-25 and affix signatures. Ayes: Myers, Hamsher, Rowell.

**JAIL REFRIGERATOR PURCHASE REQUEST.** Sergeant Wade Waddel submitted quotes to the Court, post-purchase, to confirm the emergency purchase of a new refrigerator upon failure of the existing unit. The purchase price of the new unit was \$4229.82. The department asked to move funds from Building Maintenance to Capital Outlay. The purchase was approved by Judge Myers on an emergency basis, outside of the court approval process.

**ROAD DEPARTMENT EQUIPMENT PURCHASE.** Alan Hickerson and Roy Milton of the Road Department requested the Court's approval for the purchase of an air compressor for the Long Creek shop. Three quotes were submitted as follows: JD Rents & Power Equipment - \$1450.00; Frontier Repair & Towing - \$4694.00; NAPA Auto Parts - \$1390.00, \$1499.00, \$3439.00 and \$4210.00, varying with the model and specifications. The department recommended the bid be awarded to JD Rents at \$1450.00. The purchase would come out of 5-40-0002, Capital Outlay – Road & Shop. Equipment Operator Roy Milton obtained quotes. A compressor aids in blowing out equipment (radiators, filters, cabs) rather than waiting for the mechanic. Long Creek currently doesn't have anything mobile enough for use outside of the shop. MSP: Hamsher/Myers – to approve the purchase of the compressor quoted by JD Rents & Power Equipment for \$1450.00. Ayes: Myers, Hamsher, Rowell.

**LAW ENFORCEMENT BALLOT MEASURE.**

Discussion continued about the Five-Year Law Enforcement Local Option Tax Levy. The question is whether Grant County should authorize a five-year \$0.60/\$1,000 assessed value, which may cause property taxes to increase more than three percent. The passage of this levy will allow Grant County to continue the current levels of patrol staffing for the next five years.

The ballot measure has been reworded and is in print. At present, the department has hired one additional officer. Needed vehicles are unavailable for purchase due to product demand. A meeting last night with the mayors of Granite, Dayville, Canyon City, Mt. Vernon, Long Creek, John Day and County Commissioner Jim Hamsher and Sheriff Todd McKinley was held. McKinley called the meeting productive. He is not in favor of an increase in taxes. Some of the cities don't have money to contribute. If the additional levy were to pass, Prairie City would rescind their current \$100,000 contract with the department for extra patrol services. John Day is responsible for the majority of calls. It is not fair that county ranchers would see a large tax increase when

they are not proportionate contributors to the increase in calls. McKinley presented call data as follows:

<i>GCSO CALLS FOR SERVICE</i>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b> <i>to date (7/31)</i>	<b>2023</b> <i>projected</i>
Total Calls	2803	3921	4673	2803	5000
John Day	618	1117	1934	1208	
Unincorporated	798	1125	1036	480	

McKinley said things are looking better; he has one hire in the academy and two in the process. He stated that it's the Court's job to look ahead at the future budget and its stability. It may be possible to ask for increased State Police involvement. He recommended first contacting the local sergeant. He explained that the cops grant process is an in-depth process involving financial and employee commitment. Mayor Rookstool advocated for pay per call, as has been previously introduced. She does not feel that it's fair for large property owners to shoulder the increase in taxes in comparison to other citizens responsible for that increase. Mayor Steve Fisher advocated for continued quarterly meetings with the mayors and county representatives. Myers stated that the Court has done what the Budget Committee asked, in presenting a possible levy to voters. Because the motion for the levy remained on the table from the last meeting, Myers called for question in whether to move the five-year law enforcement ballot forward.

Nay- Myers, Hamsher, Rowell. The motion died.

Hamsher and Rowell expressed commitment to put in extra time to look for solutions. Sheriff McKinley stated that as a taxpayer, he is excited to have a no vote, but as a Sheriff, he is still pleased and does not take it as a vote against law enforcement. He looks forward to exploring creative solutions for the department.

**DEPARTMENT EMPLOYEE WAGE SCALE DISCUSSION.**

Kathy Stinnett presented information about options to the current wage scale model. She introduced options to the current structure that would save money and create fairness within the system. Human Resources Manager Laurie Cates is also involved with that task. The concept was presented to the Court ten years ago, with the proposed step and pay system based on employee longevity. The changes would benefit the county, both financially and in clarity and definition for the human resource/employee department. The current system allows for the same beginning wage for a new hire as the ending wage of the previous employee. Gilliam County is a prototype for this wage scale structure. Commissioner Hamsher asked about performance-based wages, which Human Resources Manager Laurie Cates said can be problematic when dealing with pay equity. Some exceptions are allowed when dealing with pay equity, such as education, experience and longevity.

They would like to put a committee together to look at the process. They would be aware of County policy, affecting employees, and Compensation Board policy pertaining to elected officials. Stinnett has received numerous emails thanking her for looking into this. Overall, fiscal

security is a concern for many employees. Job descriptions from department to department are currently all over the page. The steps would be based on a percentage of the county judge's salary. They asked the Court for permission to assemble a committee with the goal of having recommendations by next year's budget schedule, listing potential committee members. Judy Kerr noted that the federal government operates on a step system.

MSP: Myers/Rowell – to approve the formation of a committee to explore an alternate wage structure for employees. Ayes: Myers, Hamsher, Rowell.

**11:33 a.m. - Adjourned**

Respectfully Submitted,

Laurie Stinnett  
Administrative Assistant

***- Please note: court minutes are a summary of the court proceedings. An audio recording is available, after approval of the minutes, by contacting the County Court at 541-575-0059.***