

Union County Board of Commissioners
May 2, 2018

Present: Commissioner Steve McClure
Commissioner Jack Howard
Commissioner Donna Beverage

Commissioner Beverage opened the meeting at 9:00 a.m. and the pledge of allegiance was given with all three commissioners present.

Public Comments

Blue Mt. Translator District Public Comment

Alex McHaddad, Blue Mt. Translator District Executive Director, and April Simpson, Blue Mt. Translator District Board of Directors, provided an update for the Commissioners (see attached).

Commissioner McClure stated that the District should seek a Legislative fix for their concerns. Mr. McHaddad stated that it died without a hearing last year, but they are trying to be more proactive. Ms. Simpson stated that part of the problem is that they are the only Translator District in Oregon and are not seen as a priority.

Commissioner Howard commended them for completing a successful business model. He did not think they would have much traction in the Legislature because taxing districts are not popular. He would like to see an Intergovernmental Agreement between Union County Emergency Services and the District.

Mr. McHaddad stated that other districts are funded through property taxes.

Commissioner Beverage suggested submitting a letter of support to the Association of Oregon Counties.

Elected Official, Department Head & Employee Comments

No comments were offered.

Consent Agenda

Commissioner McClure moved approval of the Consent Agenda, which included Claims Journals from April 10, 11, 17, 24, and 25. Commissioner Howard seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Administrative Matters

IUOE Local 701 Agreement

Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer, stated that a three-year contract was negotiated with IUOE Local 701 for the Union County Public Works employees with a proposed effective date of July 1, 2018. Employees voted and unanimously approved the proposed contract. The new contract would change sick time accrual to ten hours per month when employees work four, ten hours days. It would provide Air Ambulance membership for employees. The County's contribution towards medical, dental, and vision would increase by a maximum of \$75 per month; if the premium increases more than that amount then the employee will pay the difference. Retirement contribution will increase to 10.25%. Hourly rates would increase by

\$1.25 for the first year of the contract and would allow for a Cost of Living Allowance increase the second and third years.

Commissioner McClure asked about the percentage equivalent that \$1.25 per hour represented. Mrs. Burgess stated that it was between 4% and 5%, depending on an employee's hourly rate.

Commissioner McClure moved approval of the IUOE Local 701 Agreement. Commissioner Howard seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Court Order 2018-16, Appointment to the Union County Fair Board

Mrs. Burgess stated that an application was received from Margaret Spence. She had been working as an employee for the Union County Fair, but is no longer serving in that role and wants to remain involved. There is a current vacancy on the board, and if appointed, the term would expire December 31, 2021

Commissioner Howard moved approval of Court Order 2018-16. Commissioner McClure seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Beverage recessed the meeting until 10:00 a.m.

PUBLIC HEARING: Court Order 2018-15, Fire Annexation, La Grande Rural Fire Protection District

Stacy Warren, Union County Associate Planner, stated that an application was received from Shawn and Adrea Chavez to annex property into the La Grande Rural Fire Protection District. Ms. Warren read Court Order 2018-15 by title.

Commissioner Howard made a motion to waive the full reading of Court Order 2018-15. Commissioner McClure seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Beverage opened the hearing for public testimony. No testimony was offered and the hearing was closed.

Commissioner McClure moved approval of Court Order 2018-15. Commissioner Howard seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Beverage recessed the meeting until 10:15 a.m.

SECOND READING: Ordinance 2018-01, Regulated Burning Outside City Limits

Mrs. Burgess stated that Emergency Manager, JB Brock, presented Ordinance 2018-01 for the Commissioners' consideration at the April 18, 2018 meeting; the first reading was approved at that time.

Commissioner Beverage opened the hearing for public testimony. No testimony was offered and the public hearing was closed.

Commissioner McClure made a motion to approve Ordinance 2018-01. Commissioner Howard seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Beverage recessed the meeting until 10:30 a.m.

Transient Room Tax Reports

Blue Mt. Conference Center

Bob Kavanaugh, Union County Chamber of Commerce Director, provided an update about the past year's successes and challenges. Union County Tourism received a first place award from Travel Oregon for its commercial. The office is seeing more people than the previous year, including people from out of state and other countries. More revenue was generated at the conference center over the previous year and a better partnership with the military is now in place. Pricing is posted online and is fair and consistent for all renters. Accounting for the center is transparent and run through a local accounting service, not in the Chamber office. A needs assessment identified that purchases are needed to replace old equipment and supplies, such as chairs, tables, sound system, and cleaning supplies.

Commissioner McClure asked Mr. Kavanaugh if the military seemed happy with the partnership and improvements. Mr. Kavanaugh stated that the military is happy when there are defined goals to increase revenue, accountability and clear communication. Mr. Kavanaugh added that the partnership has improved over the last year and is on track to continue in that direction over the next year.

Commissioner McClure stated that the conference center is important to have in the community. It was created as a joint effort with investments from the County and other groups in the community and should be protected. It is not self-sustaining, but subsidizing costs should be looked at to maintain it.

Commissioner Howard appreciated the data presented and was glad to hear the center was making progress on the right path. He would like data collection over the next year to include demographics and to show how the center is being utilized by locals. He would like to know how the use of the center will be encouraged during flat periods, as well as what is being done to partner with community organizations.

Commissioner Beverage stated that she appreciated the work that had taken place over the last year to overcome challenges. There is more work to be done, but it is moving in the right direction.

Tourism Promotion

Mr. Kavanaugh stated that the Tourism committee was reestablished and has resulted in more input from industries. Relationships with hotel owners have improved and they are sharing what they are learning on the front lines. The Chamber established space in its office for tourists to shop, use restrooms, and find visitor information. Marketing and rebranding efforts are underway, including print ads, commercials, and Facebook. The next year will include more focus on Mt. Emily Recreation Area, Buffalo Peak Golf Course (BPGC), Eagle Cap Excursion Train, and The Elgin Opera House. Hells Canyon and attractions in Wallowa County will also be a focus.

Commissioner McClure stated that he would like the Chamber to increase its efforts to promote BPGC and other venues in the county. The County contributed an additional \$20,000 for tourism last year and the Chamber needs to do a better job of promoting local attractions.

Mr. Kavanaugh stated that tourism to the area had increased over the past year. Golf, mountain biking, and skiing are recreations that attract people to this area; those areas will be marketed better. The Eastern Oregon Film Festival is attracting people from outside the state, and the Elgin Opera House draws people from the Tri-Cities (Washington) area.

Mr. Kavanaugh stated that many people outside this area do not recognize local cities or the county, but they know Northeast Oregon. The Chamber will continue to partner with effective groups, create strong partnerships, and improve communication in the region. Work is being done to determine the identity of the local community and use that to attract more visitors. Cities are doing a good job of branding, but the region lacks a specific identity and needs professional branding.

Chamber of Commerce

Mr. Kavanaugh stated that all three areas need each other to exist (Blue Mt. Conference Center, Tourism Promotion and the Union County Chamber of Commerce.) Over the last year, the Chamber has been more engaged with the business community through after-hours events, ribbon cuttings, banquets, and representation on organization boards. Membership has increased from 150 to 300. A leadership mentorship program has been successful for up and coming businesses, as well as some that are floundering. A needs assessment showed that nonprofit agencies had been overlooked, potential business owners needed more engagement, and a stronger relationship was necessary with La Grande Main Street and other Chambers from local cities. Another overlooked area of business representation includes young professionals and business owners who work from home.

Commissioner McClure stated that coordinating a regional economic development plan with cities had stalled, but should be a priority for the new Commission next January. He agreed that engaging with potential businesses and supporting their needs is very important and extends beyond distributing a list of resources.

Commissioner Howard stated that the Chamber of Commerce should not drive economic development for Union County. He is glad that the Chamber is engaging with city councils, planning to install a visitor kiosk in North Powder, and taking a stronger interest in vacant buildings. The County needs a county-wide Office of Economic Development because those responsibilities were never designed to fall on the Chamber. He is glad that the Chamber has been willing to step up and fill in since the Union County Economic Development Corporation is not filling that role, but that arrangement will not work long term. The improvements at the Chamber over the last year have been significant and he appreciates the work they are doing.

Commissioner Beverage stated that a regional economic development plan is moving forward after a summit was held this past spring. She is glad to see the Chamber building relationships with local mayors and also connecting potential business owners to resources that are helpful.

Executive Session

Commissioner Beverage recessed the meeting for executive sessions under ORS 192.660(2)(e) and ORS 192.660(2)(h) and then called it back to order.

Next Meeting and Location

The next regular Commission meeting is scheduled to take place at the Joseph Annex Building on May 15, 2018 at 9:00 a.m.

Adjournment

Commissioner Beverage adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lorcinda Johnston
Sr. Dept. Specialist II