

Union County Budget Meeting
May 16, 2018

Present: Commissioner Steve McClure
Commissioner Jack Howard
Commissioner Donna Beverage
Stacey Candlish, Budget Committee Member
Bob Coulter, Budget Committee Member
Gene Hardy, Budget Committee Chair
Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer and Budget Officer

Call to order

Commissioner Beverage called the meeting to order and the pledge of allegiance was given. Attendance included Commissioner McClure, Commissioner Howard, Commissioner Beverage, Bob Coulter, Stacey Candlish, and Shelley Burgess.

Election of Budget Committee Chair

Bob Coulter made a motion to elect Gene Hardy as the Budget Committee Chair; he also volunteered to serve as the vice chair until Mr. Hardy arrived. Commissioner Howard seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Presentation of Budget Message

Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer, presented the budget message. The FY 2018-19 budget includes 46 funds that are balanced as presented totaling \$39,600,001. It was prepared utilizing the same format and basis of accounting as previous years. The proposed General Fund is \$11,005,874; revenues are generated from property tax and Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT), State shared revenues, fees for service and State and Federal grants. The remaining 45 funds are self-balanced and similar in amounts from previous years.

Commissioner Howard asked if the contingency fund changed as a result of PILT funding. Mrs. Burgess stated that she requested that the contingency fund continue at the same level as the previous year.

Mr. Coulter stated that it seemed like there could be a way for the budget committee to reallocate some funds from the contingency funds. Mrs. Burgess stated that some funds are dedicated and cannot be reallocated to other areas, but the Budget Committee can direct staff to look for funds if it feels funding is inadequate for a specific program.

Mt. Emily Recreation Area (MERA)

Sean Chambers, Parks Director, 10513 N. McAlister, Island City, stated that season projects are grant driven. Revenue primarily comes from Oregon State Parks, along with grants from the Oregon State Marine Board. The number of volunteers has increased slightly; there is more need for professional volunteers, such as web development and map development. Forest management work continues according to the Forest Management plan in a methodical and careful way.

Commissioner McClure noted that the County is no longer making transfers into the MERA fund now that the timber management plan has been implemented and MERA is self-sustaining.

Mr. Chambers stated that the County will continue to seek more acreage from neighboring property owners. Grant funds are available for those acquisitions and connectivity to the fairgrounds is important.

Parks Fund

Mr. Chambers stated that the goal is to provide an enjoyable outdoor experience for campers and boaters. Work includes general maintenance of parks, such as signage, restrooms, and tables. Funding comes from State Parks, RV fees, and the Oregon State Marine Board. A grant was secured for the replacement of the Wolf Creek dock; that project is still in process.

Public Works

Doug Wright, Public Works Director, stated that revenues increased due to unexpected Secure Rural Schools (SRS) funding. There may be an increase in State revenues from the new gas tax. Personnel expenses are similar to previous years.

Gene Hardy arrived at the meeting.

Mr. Coulter recessed the meeting for five minutes.

Mr. Wright stated that aging equipment will be replaced as needed. Funds will also be used on materials and projects, as well as setting some aside for snow plowing in the winter.

Commissioner Howard asked Mr. Wright if he needed assistance with social media and public relations. Mr. Wright stated that it would be helpful; it is time intensive to update the website with current information and road project notification is currently completed through public signage.

Mr. Wright stated that the increase in professional services was a result of professional engineering services for the High Valley bridge. The half-time accounting specialist position was eliminated and those responsibilities have been filled by the office manager.

Airport Operations

Mr. Wright stated that he would like to purchase a hitch mower for the tractor. He proposed a transfer to the airport capital fund to purchase 40 acres adjacent to the airport for future development. Runway improvement projects are ongoing. The Rappel Base design is at 90% and has an expected construction start date of August 2018.

Airport Capital Improvement Fund

Mr. Wright stated that major objectives at the airport are to complete the sewer project to serve the Rappel Base, existing FBO, and fire cache.

Weed Control Fund

Brian Clapp, Weed Supervisor, stated that next year goals are in keeping with the previous year and include working with private landowners and public entities to control weeds. He is collaborating with neighboring counties and has received two grants for weed treatment services assistance. The landowner Cost Share program has been successful in providing expertise, identifying weeds, and reducing costs incurred by private landowners to treat weeds. Mr. Clapp discussed the need for additional indoor storage for equipment.

Mr. Hardy added that the Cost Share program will be more widely used as more people learn about it.

Community Corrections

Travis Miller, Community Corrections Manager, 1007 Fourth Street, La Grande, stated that the overall budget was more than the previous year now that more offenders are kept in the community and not sent to prison. Supervision numbers have increased but the County does not receive funding from the State for misdemeanor supervision cases. The department received a grant from the Justice Reinvestment Fund, which will be used to fund a half-time Probation Services Counselor position as well as funding for transitional housing and additional jail beds. This department will add a full time position needed as a result of new sentencing practices that have added more offenders in the community. Caseloads for current employees are heavier than other counties, ranging from 65 to 72 offenders, when it should be limited to 55 offenders.

Surveyor

Shelley Burgess stated that land surveys for the County are provided by Bagett, Griffith & Blackman on a contract basis. There are no new programs and the budget is relatively the same as the previous year.

Human Services Program

Mrs. Burgess stated that funding is received from the Department of Human Services for Mental Health, Public Health, Veterans Services, and Prevention Alcohol & Drug Services; these are passed through to Center for Human Development (CHD) who provides the services.

Mr. Hardy recessed the meeting and called it back to order.

Justice Court

Mrs. Burgess stated that the Justice Court has been successful in generating excess revenue, resulting in a transfer of funds to the Sheriff's and District Attorney's Departments. Budget changes include an increase in revenue projection. Citing officers determine which court will hear the cases and as such could impact the number of cases heard by the Justice Court from year to year. It currently employs one full time employee; due to the heavy workload, an hourly assistant position has been budgeted and will be utilized only as needed.

Economic Development

Mrs. Burgess stated that Economic Development funds come from Transient Room Tax revenue and are distributed to the Economic Development and Tourism programs within the County including Tourism Promotion, the Chamber of Commerce, Discretionary Grant Program, small cities with hotels/motels, and the Blue Mt. Conference Center Foundation. Last year funds were added for Economic Development/Tourism specific projects, but no additional requests were presented. The proposed budget includes \$50,000 for those type of projects, but will only be spent if a project is presented that the Commissioners feel is worthy of contribution. This fund also includes a transfer to Buffalo Peak Golf Course for the debt service.

Ms. Candlish asked about services provided by the Chamber. Mrs. Burgess stated that the County contribution supports all of the Chamber activities. Ms. Candlish noted that the Chamber requested an additional \$5,000 this year that was not included in the proposed budget. Mrs. Burgess stated that the committee could increase funds to the Chamber, but it would reduce the contingency.

Predator Control

Patrick Smith, USDA Wildlife Services Program Eastern Oregon District Supervisor, thanked the committee for past support and stated that this year's request is more than past years. One employee shares his time between Baker and Union Counties, but a full-time position is needed in Union County to allow them to be more proactive than reactive. Federal funding has decreased and State funding is stagnant. He would like to see a regional approach from Commissioners to secure more funding.

EOU-GED Program

Cathy Trochlell stated that this is the only GED program in Union County and houses the only testing center in Union, Wallowa, and Baker Counties. The average age of students is mid-20s to late-30s; they typically have a specific plan of what they want to accomplish next. The program received a grant to provide more services and will hold a graduation ceremony on June 6. The average number of graduates per year is 25 and this year there are 40. The program receives referrals from the Drug Court, CHD, Department of Human Services, and the La Grande High School GED Program.

Mr. Hardy was impressed with the high number of students that continue on to college after earning a GED.

Center for Human Development, Inc. (CHD)

Carrie Brogoitti, CHD Public Health Administrator, stated that funding passed through the County are for specific services. Co-locating services under one roof is providing the County a return on its investment. The goal is to create a healthy community which impacts the entire community, not just individual health. CHD has been successful in preventing disease through immunizations, providing Behavioral Health support in schools, connecting Veterans with eligible benefits, treating patients in the Alcohol & Drug program, and offering alternative care at a non-opioid pain clinic.

Commissioner Howard noted that the budget had flat lined and asked if it was an indicator of problems. Ms. Brogoitti stated that CHD requested an increase last year and appreciated what the County was able to contribute. If more funding was made available, more services would be provided. Commissioner Howard stated that he would like to see a steady funding increase each year.

Buffalo Peak Golf Course

Mrs. Burgess stated that in last year's budget meeting there was discussion about making changes and increasing rates at the golf course. A community meeting was held in Union and the advisory committee became active with newly appointed members. It has been determined that the golf course will never fund itself completely, but is regarded as an amenity. Expenses have been reviewed and cut back as much as possible. Some increased costs are a result of advertising and maintenance and upgrades. Many volunteer hours were donated to complete a basic facelift. Season passes, regular rates, and cart rental rates increased and the twilight rate has been successful. A business plan was drafted and discussions are ongoing with the State to freeze the interest rate on the loan that it carries. Revenues are more accurately reflected in the budget proposal.

Commissioner Howard stated that it would be legitimate for the City of Union to contribute funds for maintenance of operations and promotions. There should be some engagement from the City;

they have a role to play and have not met it, yet the community supports it. He suggested that the budget include \$20,000 from Economic Development to be set aside as match funding; if the City of Union contributes funding then they can buy in to management. Union County should not be the only agency to sponsor the course.

Commissioner Beverage stated that the City hired a new city manager and those types of conversations are taking place. Commissioner Howard stated that he would like to have a concrete agreement with the City. Commissioner Beverage agreed that the City of Union should have more buy-in.

Mrs. Burgess stated that one of the advisory committee's goals is to increase support from the City as a government and the community as a whole. There are small ways they can contribute. They are trying to engage the City gently, not forcefully.

Commissioner Howard asked why the approach is not more direct. The City's buy-back option has monetary value to them and it needs to be addressed as business. It is a great park amenity, but citizens in other cities should not subsidize the benefits that Union is reaping.

Mr. Coulter appreciated that conversations with the new city manager were taking place and would like to hear how much Union could work towards contributing.

Commissioner Beverage stated that the new city manager is engaged in the conversation and frequents the golf course, which has not been done in years.

Ms. Candlish noted that Union's alternative to manage their wastewater would be much more expensive.

Mrs. Burgess stated that she would have no problem informing the city that the budget committee is looking for a financial contribution.

Other Discussion

Commissioner Howard asked if law library funding could be used to codify ordinances. Mrs. Burgess stated that it is budgeted and will need approval from the local Bar Association.

Ms. Candlish was interested in more conversation about obtaining a building for the Weed Program.

Mr. Hardy recessed the meeting until May 17, 2018 at 4:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lorcinda Johnston
Sr. Dept. Specialist II