

Deeper Cuts in County Services Projected

May 8, 2013

By Stacy D. Stumbo of the Daily Courier

From Page News

http://www.thedailycourier.com/articles/2013/05/08/front_page_news/news01.txt

Josephine County residents can expect more deep cuts in services this coming fiscal year.

During the Budget Committee's first meeting on Tuesday, the six-member group learned that without some new source of revenue, the overall county budget will drop by 10 percent, reserves will be nearly used up and about 16 people will lose their jobs by next summer.

"We are facing challenges, especially in our criminal justice system, but the county will still be in business in fiscal year 2013-14," Rosemary Padgett, the county's chief financial officer, told the committee.

To balance the budget, which is required by state law, Padgett anticipates 15.74 full-time equivalent positions will have to be cut. Of those, 4.85 will come from the Sheriff's and District Attorney's offices and the Juvenile Justice Department.

"These reductions will further impact service levels to the citizens of Josephine County," Padgett said. "In the last decade, the county has reduced the county government by over 400 positions, including 62 in the Sheriff's Office. Some programs were outsourced to nonprofit agencies while other programs were drastically cut to minimum levels of service."

Last year, the end of longtime federal subsidies and the defeat of a proposed property tax increase left the criminal justice system with a \$12 million budget shortfall. The lack of funding resulted in layoffs of more than 90 criminal justice workers.

Padgett said, "With no new funding, the proposed budget reflects an estimated decrease of approximately 30 percent for public safety programs in the criminal justice system, leaving approximately \$450,000 for carryover for fiscal year 2014-15 compared with \$3.965 million in fiscal year 2013-14."

A proposed three-year local option tax to pay for criminal justice and public safety services will come to voters on May 21. It would generate about \$9.1 million a year. But, there is no guarantee the \$1.48 per \$1,000 of assessed property value tax will pass.

Padgett said the overall proposed budget is \$67 million, down from \$74 million in 2012-13. Most of the county's budget is made up of "pass-through" money from the state and federal governments that must be used for specific purposes. Commissioners have discretionary use of only about \$7.8 million in the budget for the new fiscal year, which begins on July 1. That money is a combination of property taxes, nondedicated fees and carryover money. More than \$4 million

of that amount is already spoken for and will be allocated to public safety, Public Works and other departments.

Padgett said most county programs are "self-sustaining" through fees, grants, state contracts, and other revenue sources that don't rely on property taxes or the general fund.

The Budget Committee is made up of three private citizens and the three Josephine County commissioners. The members will meet several times before adopting a budget.

On Tuesday, the group heard presentations from the Assessor's Office, Forestry, Planning and Public Health departments. The committee also listened to recommendations from the Elected Official Compensation Committee.

James Cornish, of the Elected Official Compensation Committee, said although the group's role is to compare compensation levels of local officials to those of similarly-sized Oregon counties, this year the group wanted to make other suggestions.

Half of that committee said elected officials should "share" in the economic hardship the county is facing and their "compensation should be cut due to the lack of revenue. The opinion of the other half of these members was that elected officials compensation should be based on comparable positions and the nature of the work rather than availability of funding." Cornish said.

County elected officials haven't had a cost of living increase in four years. The Budget Committee decided to revisit the issue closer to the end of their hearings.

o o o

Reach reporter Stacy D. Stumbo at 541-474-3806 or sstumbo@thedailycourier.com
Stumbo, Stacy D. May 8, 2013. *Deeper cuts in county services projected*. "The Grants Pass Daily Courier". Grants Pass, OR