

Justice officials outline fiscal cuts

May 8, 2015

By Jim Moore of the Daily Courier

Community News

The Grants Pass Daily Courier (TGPDC)

<http://www.thedailycourier.com/articles/2015/05/08/community/news0001.txt>

Not even the promise of federal county payments money can keep the Josephine County public safety departments from cutting services beginning July 1.

Josephine County is expecting to receive \$4.6 million this year following a last-second two-year extension of county payments funding by Congress last month. That is less federal money than is in this year's budget.

The Sheriff's Office, District Attorney and Juvenile Justice all presented proposed budgets for fiscal year 2015-16 Thursday that contain cuts despite the federal money.

Sheriff Dave Daniel told the county Budget Committee his department will lose the equivalent of nearly 12 full-time positions based on his budget being slashed to \$6.06 million, compared to \$7.25 million in the current fiscal year.

A key reduction will be 10 positions at the jail, which will reduce the jail inmate capacity to 70. It's at 130 now, which includes 28 beds leased by the city of Grants Pass. The contract with the city ends June 30 and it's unclear whether the city will renew it.

Daniel said the last-minute influx of federal money allowed him to keep the jail open and staved off a "moral and ethical" dilemma he has fretted over, which is how he would address some 25 Measure 11 suspects who are in jail awaiting trial. Measure 11 is a 1994 state law that requires mandatory prison sentences for several violent crimes, ranging from murder to armed robbery.

"Do I just release them back into the public?" he asked.

The District Attorney's office has a budget of \$1.83 million for next year, compared to \$1.893 million this year.

New District Attorney Ryan Mulkins, who took over for Stephen Campbell in March, said he will have to cut one prosecutor.

He asked the Budget Committee to consider allocating the office an additional \$106,000 to hire another attorney and \$57,000 for a legal secretary position that was cut in the 2012-13 budget.

Meanwhile, Juvenile Justice, with a budget of \$1,019,700, is facing a cut of \$81,000.

Prior budget cuts forced the closure of the county's juvenile detention unit. Instead Director Jim Goodwin contracts with other counties for jail beds for youths.

Goodwin told the Budget Committee he was able to negotiate a new lease with Douglas County for beds that allowed him to cut costs.

As a result, he is able to maintain 8.6 full time equivalent positions, using 13 different employees.

All three public safety departments will benefit if a tax levy request on the May 19 ballot passes.

The proposed levy would be for five years. It would cost \$1.40 per \$1,000 of assessed property value and would generate about \$9 million a year.

The money is earmarked for more sheriff's deputies, increased capacity at the jail, and the reopening of the Juvenile Justice Center.

The Budget Committee scheduled meetings for May 21 and May 28 at the recommendation of county Finance Director Arthur O'Hare.

O'Hare suggested that if the levy is approved the committee can cancel the May 21 meeting and convene May 28 with new figures reflecting levy money.

If the levy fails, the committee will meet on May 21 and likely finish its business at that time.

The Budget Committee comprises all three county commissioners — Keith Heck, Cherryl Walker and Simon Hare — and three at-large members. The at-large members are Pat Fahey, Jim Brumbach and Margaret Goodwin.

The Budget Committee recommends a budget to the Board of Commissioners for final approval.

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