

Animal tax levy adds \$500,000 to county budget

Jim Moore/daily Courier
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Animal lovers made a \$500,000 impact on Josephine County's budget for fiscal year 2014-15 last month when they approved a three-year property tax levy for the county's Animal Protection program.

The levy sets a rate of 8 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value. Based on the anticipated revenue from the levy, the Budget Committee allocated an additional \$500,000 to the recommended budget.

Commissioners are scheduled to vote on the budget Wednesday morning after public testimony. The meeting is scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. at Anne Basker Auditorium, 604 N.W. Sixth St.

The levy revenue more than doubles Animal Protection's budget, taking it from \$422,200 to \$922,000, allowing the department to expand hours and better care for the animals that land at the county's shelter.

Diane Hoover, the Josephine County public health director who is in charge of Animal Protection, said her plan is to set aside \$150,000 this year in a contingency fund.

She also intends to increase the animal shelter staff by 1.9 full-time-equivalent positions, which will allow her to increase hours at the shelter by one hour per day.

The shelter, which is located at 1420 Brookside Blvd. in Merlin, is now open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The extra money will also allow the department to spay and neuter, vaccinate and provide emergency veterinary care for animals at the shelter. Hoover also wants to fund a training program for staff to teach them how to mitigate risks inherent with animal care work. And she would like county commissioners to establish a formal advisory board comprised of nine county citizens to advise her on shelter matters and conduct long-term planning for animal issues in the county.

The county's operating budget is \$17.4 million, which is an increase of about \$2 million over the current budget — including the bump in funding for Animal Protection. Most of the rest of the increase is in the contingency fund.

The extra money mostly comes from two sources. One is payments in lieu of taxes, which are federal payments to local governments that help offset losses in property taxes due to non-taxable federal land. The other is revenue from salvage timber sales.

The proposed budget for the Sheriff's Office is \$5.7 million, although \$141,000 in the contingency fund has not been allocated. Rosemary Padgett, the county's chief financial officer, said she anticipates the Sheriff's Office will request that money. As recently as three years ago, the Sheriff's Budget was more than \$9 million.

The total recommended budget of \$84.8 million is a significant increase over the current budget \$68.7 million due to capital projects funded by grant money from state and federal sources that must be spent on specific departments and programs. Other than the \$17.4 million operating budget, however, the rest of the money in the budget is "pass through" funding from state and federal sources that commissioners have no control over. For example, \$4 million is for multiple work at the airport, including \$1.7 million for runway expansion to be paid by a grant from the Federal Aviation Administration.

The transit fund will increase by \$3 million, with \$1.9 million coming from Grants Pass as pass through funds from the federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality program for sidewalk work. Another \$620,000 is grant money to buy new buses.

In a nutshell

- who: Josephine County commissioners
- When: Wednesday, 9 a.m.
- Where: Anne Basker Auditorium, 604 N.W. Sixth St.
- hot topic: Budget

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