

Commissioners to consider total county budget

Community

By Jim Moore of the Daily Courier

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Paying for the Sheriff's Office always captures the public's attention but the total budget will be the focus of the Josephine County Board of Commissioners on Wednesday.

This year the total budget for fiscal year 2015-2016 is \$78.6 million at the moment, but it will be increased by \$972,000 once the Grants Pass City Council approves a contract to lease jail beds from the county. The City Council is scheduled to approve the lease at its own meeting Wednesday night.

Most of the county's total budget is pass-through funding from the state and federal governments that comes with strings attached and is dedicated to specific funds.

The board and the Budget Committee have input on funds generally referred to as the operating budget, which totals \$16.3 million.

The operating budget includes \$6.06 million for the Sheriff's Office, which was the amount recommended by the Budget Committee. That total will be boosted by the money from the city for jail beds.

The operating budget also contains the other two departments of the criminal justice system, which are the District Attorney's Office with a \$1.99 million budget and Juvenile Justice with a budget of just over \$1 million.

The second largest fund in the operating budget is the general fund contingency at just over \$3 million.

Other budget items in the operating budget are the Assessor's Office at \$1.17 million, Forestry at \$949,000, the Clerk's Office at \$572,000, Planning for \$492,000, internal services at \$478,000, the Treasurer at \$444,000 and the Surveyor for \$74,000.

Major capital projects in the budget are \$2.2 million for building repair and maintenance, \$1.4 million for public works (roads and bridges) and \$1.3 million for equipment replacement.

The aforementioned projects include \$560,000 for transit to purchase two 35-passenger buses, \$350,000 for a Fairgrounds arena roof and \$250,000 to replace the Lakeshore Drive Spillway Bridge.

Even though the Budget Committee recommended the budget, it's within the Board's purview to change it, although any alterations that exceed 10 percent of the budget will require a supplementary budget hearing.

It's possible one change could happen, "The major issue is going to be the road dollars," Finance

Director Arthur O'Hare said.

O'Hare is referring to about \$1 million in federal money that is earmarked for the Public Works Department.

An Oregon law passed in 2012 identified eight cash-strapped counties — including Josephine County — that could use that money for law enforcement purposes as long as they are related to roads.

Budget Committee member Margaret Goodwin suggested transferring at least part of that money to the Sheriff's Office. Her motion failed, but the board has openly discussed possibly doing that.

In other business Wednesday, the board will consider an ordinance that would amend the county's comprehensive plan.

The amendment would reflect a decision made by board members Keith Heck and Simon Hare allowing Sunny Valley Sand & Gravel to operate a gravel mine if the company met multiple contingencies. Commissioner Cherryl Walker did not participate in that vote.

The board's decision came after three months of heated public meetings and has been appealed to the Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals.

The meeting is scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. at Anne Basker Auditorium, 600 N.W. Sixth St. in downtown Grants Pass.