

County approves budget; road funds won't go to sheriff

Front Page News

By Jim Moore of the Daily Courier

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The Josephine County Board of Commissioners on Wednesday unanimously approved the 2015-16 recommended operating budget of \$16.3 million.

The county's overall budget is actually \$78.6 million, but the bulk of that — over \$60 million — is capital projects and pass-through funding from the state and federal governments that is dedicated by law to specific programs.

That includes about \$1 million in federal money that is earmarked for the Public Works Department but recently has been the subject of much public comment due to a proposal that it be transferred to the Sheriff's Office.

Finance Director Arthur O'Hare told the board that their vote on Wednesday doesn't preclude the board from transferring those funds in the future.

In fact, there will be at least one tweak to the budget because the Grants Pass City Council Wednesday night approved an agreement with the county to lease 28 beds in the Josephine County Jail at the rate of \$972,000 during the fiscal year.

The county's current operating budget, which expires in two weeks, is just under \$19 million. Much of the county's operating budget comes from federal subsidies, which Congress is phasing out, to offset reductions in O&C timber revenue.

At Wednesday's meeting, Budget Committee member Margaret Goodwin implored the board to transfer the road funds to the Sheriff's Office as allowed on a limited, temporary basis by state law. Ten other members of the public supported Goodwin.

The operating budget of \$16.3 million includes \$6.06 million for the sheriff, 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 budget of \$1.99 million 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.

In other business, Commission Chairman Keith Heck and Commissioner Simon Hare passed the first reading of an ordinance that amends the Josephine County comprehensive plan.

The ordinance is a result of a decision the two board members made in October that changes the zoning in an area of the Sunny Valley and opens the door for Sunny Valley Sand & Gravel to operate a gravel mine. Commissioner Cheryl 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.

Five members of the public testified against the ordinance.

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