

Commissioners discuss budget

Jim Moore/daily Courier

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A contract between Grants Pass and Josephine County to dedicate jail beds for city use will boost the county's revenue during the 2014-15 fiscal year by nearly \$1 million. The City Council created a new utility rate Wednesday night to generate \$972,000 to fund beds through June 30, 2015.

A similar contract will expire the end of this month. The contract that's in place guarantees the city 20 jail beds per day and up to 30 if they are needed and are available. The new contract sets a flat rate of 28 beds per day.

That contract, as well as another \$500,000 that is expected during the budget year from the new Animal Protection levy that passed last month, didn't exist when the Josephine County Budget Committee last month approved a recommended budget.

On Wednesday, Rosemary Padgett, the county's chief financial officer, told the Board of Commissioners how the anticipated revenue will alter the budget. The big change is that the Sheriff's Office will receive an additional \$655,000. Sheriff Gil Gilbertson originally requested that amount from the road fund. This time he asked for general fund reserve dollars.

Commissioners agreed to that total but decided to take \$311,000 from the general fund contingency and the rest from the public safety contingency fund.

Josephine County Jail Commander Vicki Smith told the Daily Courier that the extra money translates to 12 hours of patrol coverage in the county, seven days a week.

The Animal Protection levy money means more staff for that department and it will make it possible for the department to spay and neuter, vaccinate and provide emergency veterinary care for animals at the shelter. Voters last month approved a three-year levy with a rate of 8 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value.

The additional revenue from the city and the animal protection levy push the county operating budget to nearly \$19 million. Commissioners took public testimony on the new-look budget Wednesday and scheduled a vote on it for next Wednesday.

The meeting also included two diversions from the agenda and seemed related to a recall effort against commission Chairwoman Cherryl Walker.

Dale Matthews, a video blogger who tangled with Walker over placement of his camcorder at a meeting in January, was cut off when his comments about the budget drifted off topic.

Walker admonished Matthews, and when Matthews continued to talk, Commissioner Keith Heck had Matthews' microphone shut off. An audience member told Matthews to sit down and shut up.

Later during the meeting, Matthews delivered a statement about the effort to recall Walker and tangled with Commissioner Simon Hare in the process.

After Hare called Matthews "condescending" and "rude," Matthews claimed that a group seeking Walker's recall talked about recalling all three commissioners but eventually decided it should be just Walker.

Matthews also said Hare encouraged the group to go after Walker and leave him alone.

At the end of the meeting, Hare said Matthews' "issues are flagrantly false on so many fronts."

Meanwhile, Jack Swift, who is also involved in the recall effort, upbraided the commissioners for not voting on a proposed ordinance concerning opening roads on federal land in the county. Commissioners told him they are working on the matter and that there is a process to be followed and that it can't be sped up.

Ed Bowers, a former candidate for county commissioner, testified that Swift's idea is not logical unless the logic is "a political game to make all three commissioners look bad."

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