

Gilbertson, and Henner at odds over heated public safety issue

Stacy D. Stumbo, Reporter of the Daily Courier

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"I'm just sick of it," Gilbertson said after he read a memorandum sent to City Manager Aaron Cubic by city Public Safety Chief Joe Henner. "This is just a continuation of the city-county, county-city rivalry. There's this constant conflict that doesn't need to exist."

The memo relates to recent discussions about consolidating law enforcement services in the city and the county after the failure of a property tax levy to support the criminal justice system. The Grants Pass City Council will discuss the issue during Monday's workshop and a special meeting about possible options to aid the county.

"Consolidation of law enforcement services under the umbrella of the Josephine County Sheriff's Office is a bad idea," Henner wrote.

Gilbertson said Henner made some legitimate points in the memorandum, but parts seem to be aimed at personally attacking Gilbertson and demeaning the role of the sheriff — at least that's the sheriff's interpretation.

"For elected Sheriffs in Oregon, very few minimum standards exist," [emphasis added]

Henner wrote. "This is not meant to reflect negatively on any current or former sheriff but you really never know who will be providing leadership at the sheriff's office. That is because elected sheriffs can come and go with every election. At a recent meeting, the current Sheriff stated he 'answers to no one,' with respect to decision making about law enforcement in the county."

Gilbertson said Henner's claim that he would boast that he answers to no one is false.

"That really got under my skin," Gilbertson said. "I can't, in my wildest imagination, think of a time I would ever say something like that. I answer to the people of this county every day. It's either a fabrication or an out-and-out lie."

Henner could not be reached for comment on Friday.

Gilbertson said any proposal to consolidate has not come from his office. However, he did participate in a conversation with two city councilors who were interested in the idea. One estimate Gilbertson heard is that by consolidating with the county, the city could save between \$5 million and \$6 million a year. The arrangement would be similar to a contract the county has with the city of Cave Junction that the city pays the Sheriff's Office about \$160,000 a year in exchange for 40 hours a week of deputy patrols.

Henner wrote: "We help keep the downtown vibrant and safe based upon Council goals and our own desires for a safe and livable community. You don't want that priority trumped by an elected Sheriff who instead diverts your police officers to Jubilee Park in Cave Junction, or speeding drivers in Galice."

Gilbertson said Henner's contention is unfounded and services within the city would remain the same. He asserted city residents would not pay for patrols in the county.

"My concerns are for the entire county," Gilbertson said. "That includes every city inside the county. From a best practices standpoint, that means providing the best services at the least cost."

Gilbertson said county residents have been looking for a solution to ongoing struggles to maintain its criminal justice system for years, and consolidation may not be the answer, but city officials should still discuss it.

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Reach reporter Stacy D. Stumbo at 541-474-3806 or sstumbo@thedailycourier.com