

## **Public safety round table recommended**

By Jay Meredith

February 02, 2016

Guest Opinion, *The Grants Pass Daily Courier*

<http://www.thedailycourier.com/articles/2016/02/02/opinion/news01.txt>

JAY MEREDITH

This is a shortened version of a proposal recently submitted to the Josephine County Board of Commissioners called the "Round Table of Josephine County." Its mission would be to accept and review proposals for providing financial resources to the law enforcement and justice programs operated by Josephine County — to solve this crisis for good.

The Round Table is a public outreach campaign asking Josephine County residents, "How do we work together to solve the financial crisis that currently exists in Josephine County's law enforcement and justice programs?"

Beginning immediately, the county should recruit members for the Round Table, which should meet at least twice a month for the remainder of 2016. This would be either an official task force or county committee.

The commissioners' order creating the Round Table should provide adequate authority for the Round Table. Commissioners should be members, but without voting rights. Commissioners' leadership role in this critical public challenge should be to create an environment that encourages citizen participation, not to lead the discussion.

Somewhat "politically neutral" community members on the Round Table would be a bonus — not individuals who have aggressively campaigned either for or against past county law enforcement levy proposals. Round Table members need only care about saving our county from this crisis and restoring law enforcement services.

In addition to immediately advertising for members, commissioners should separately advertise for proposals from citizens — any and all budgetary solutions or financial proposals to provide some funding for county public safety programs. They should provide some basic ground rules for how to submit a proposal and what the commissioners are looking for in proposals. A web page should be created on the county's website that has a basic description of the law enforcement funding crisis and the estimated costs for different levels of service, so everyone is on the same page.

County law enforcement and county justice programs are at least \$8 million per year short of what they need just to get back to service levels seen in 2011. That hole grows larger next year if federal funding is not renewed. Commissioners need to explain the problem as simply and concisely as possible, and find a way to get that message out to as many people as possible, while soliciting input.

Proposed solutions do not have to solve the entire funding challenge, but should provide at least \$300,000 per year in sustainable financial resources to county public safety so that they can be combined with other solutions to restore law enforcement programs. The message should largely be about the crisis we face today, but there should also be a disclosure about the financial effects of what would happen in 2017 if federal "county payments" are not renewed. We're in crisis today, but it could get worse.

The Round Table should invite those making proposals for a brief presentation and Q&A session. There should be two votes after each Round Table proposal, one straw poll vote of everyone at the meeting including citizens, and then a vote by voting-members of the Round Table. Any majority, vote either by the Round Table or the straw poll, would send a proposal to the commissioners for further review.

The Commissioners should deliberate on all accepted Round Table proposals in weekly business sessions. Each proposal will be deemed to be worthy of consideration as part of the series of solutions or something that can't be done or won't work for reasons explained in detail by commissioners. For commissioners, the Round Table should be an exercise in listening first, and then taking action based on citizen recommendations.

By the end of 2016, we should have a list of potential solutions and will have done some research on each of them to see if they are possible and if they are supported by Josephine County residents. Anything that needs to go to a vote of the people should wait until the vote in May 2017.

The Round Table should also take public comment and televise or video-record all meetings. Transparency is important.

Community leaders and entrepreneurial thinkers, your county needs you. And as the Round Table name suggests, there is no head of the table, implying that everyone who sits at the table has equal status. As it should be — of the people, by the people, for the people. We, the people, can't afford to allow this law enforcement crisis to continue.

---

Jay Meredith serves as president and board chairman of Securing Our Safety, a private citizens' group that seeks secure and stable funding for public safety programs in Josephine County.