

## **Analysis needed for budget solution (Guest Opinion)**

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According to a headline in the Daily Courier, "Officials say county is facing public safety fiscal emergency" (March 17). The Josephine County Local Public Safety Coordinating Council was responding to a request from county commissioners to give its opinion on what it would consider to be the lowest acceptable level of local law enforcement services. Asking for an analysis would have been a good idea. Asking for an intermediary opinion is a problem. Professional opinion is respected, and sadly, in my view, the council's vote did not meet any standard for determining that the minimally acceptable level of public safety services was not being provided. Voting your opinions, without analysis, is not understanding, and another government opinion in our local political climate is the same stalemate.

The Oregon Legislature used forward thinking to address potential public safety fiscal emergencies in passing 2009 legislation on the minimally acceptable level of public safety services (MALPSS). It aggressively acted in anticipation of the loss of federal payments and continued to refine its technical planning concept through 2013: Oregon Senate Bill 77 (2009), Oregon House Bill 4176 (2012), and Oregon House Bill 3453 (2013).

Advice from the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission on Senate Bill 77 was prudent. It had the task of writing the regulations to implement the 2009 law — rules for determining "minimally acceptable" in an affected county. Even this experienced body encountered difficulty in reviewing and analyzing public safety services provided by counties to determine whether a county was providing a MALPSS. However, the significant first question of the state Commission was: What services should be taken into account, what are the key data elements in measuring a particular public safety service and how should they be measured?

In 2013, the Hugo Exploratory Committee took the commission's measurement advocacy to heart because it felt an educated public makes informed decisions. It, and I, feel strongly that there must be an understandable process that addresses the following elements in a scientific, documented, publicly accessible way: 1. Affected conditions — description of existing conditions being evaluated, and 2. Application of indicators and standards for significance determinations. This is all very bureaucratic planning process stuff, but the point is that an informed public needs to understand the rationale that is applied to its problem, or it is just hearsay.

As county neighbors become ever more involved in the safety issue as a part of their daily lives, it is crucial that they have the opportunity to decipher the barrage of conflicting information and opinions coming at them, and use this information in their opinion-forming and decision-making processes. Vetted facts would be immensely helpful in making decisions about the severity of identified problems.

For example, consider the planning involved in preparing for natural disaster emergencies. Can anyone hear the earthquake that is coming? Comprehensive preparedness is a tool for developing emergency information and operations plans. It promotes a common understanding of the fundamentals of risk-informed planning and decision-making to help the public examine a hazard or threat and produce coordinated plans and responses. Planning also helps prepare for political conflicts, economic crises, and other catastrophic events that threaten the lives of people and communities. This is exactly the kind of problem a MALPSS analysis was designed to address.

In my opinion, staffing standards are the key to understanding the public safety issue. For example, the use of officers per 1,000 population for police is an ineffective performance measure. It is also not useful to make comparisons with other communities as the sole criterion, or with conditions that do not address staffing standards such as declining federal payments. Instead, the determination should be made for the time required to meet the mandated or policy staffing standards on a daily, monthly, and seasonal basis.

What did the Local Public Safety Coordinating Council do? According to the newspaper, it voted to declare that the county was in a public safety funding crisis or about to be in one. What evidence was used to come to this conclusion? The evidence for the short one-time meeting was comments and opinions the day of the vote without analysis: 1. If the emergency isn't here already, it's on the way; 2. Are we in an emergency now? I think we are; 3. Are we in one now? I think we'll all agree we'll be in one if we get cut; 4. We're looking at cutting that (current funding) in half again; 5. Wouldn't this just be kicking the can again down the road? It'd be better to have a can to kick; and 6. No plan was in place for a permanent solution. If this county's not prepared to do that, what's the point?

The coordinating council provided an opinion. Did it address the need? According to the newspaper, the council avoided the need to decide if the county was currently in an emergency by merely deciding that one either existed or one was "imminent." This statement does not make sense to me. How does substituting one opinion over another meet the need?

The council is the logical group to advise the commissioners. I ask it not to stop now. I recommend that its analysis moves from opinions on comparisons of declining federal payments toward analyzing actual or needed workloads, perhaps with the use of zero-based-budgeting. It should also comprehensively address the direct and indirect impacts to county communities. Finally, serious proposals must consider, in a public forum, the community's ability and inclination to fund public safety services. An independent MALPSS analysis would be a documented study available to the public for review, versus the traditional time-saving method of using professional opinion without vetted facts.

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