

# WHAT DO JOSEPHINE COUNTY CITIZENS REALLY THINK ABOUT PUBLIC SAFETY?

## PRESS RELEASE

*Justice System & Public Safety Services Study Design: 2015*

Justice System Exploratory Committee

Hugo Neighborhood Association & Historical Society

Web Page: <http://www.hugoneighborhood.org/justicesystemexploratorycommittee.htm>

November 22, 2015

After four failed public safety levies and one sales tax, in as many years, the public could be excused if it feels exhausted. What does the public really think about public safety?

On November 7, 2015 Nathan Davis, a 2<sup>nd</sup> year graduate student, at Oregon State University (OSU), formally settled on tiering his Master's of Public Policy (MPP) Essay research paper to the Josephine County (JO CO) Justice System & Public Safety Services (JS&PSS) public safety issue. Nathan is in the OSU School of Public Policy which is part of the OSU Rural Studies Program (RSP).

Davis stated, *“The importance of government hearing citizen voices is what attracted me to policy research and, inevitably, to this project in Josephine County.”* He grew up in a rural Illinois county in which citizens often felt overlooked by government. During Davis’ undergraduate studies and through his work with various policy institutions, he learned the importance of research in governmental action. At OSU, he expanded his knowledge of policy research and the role it can play in making government action more effective and more democratic. *“This project not only affords me the chance to utilize this knowledge, but it also allows me to help create solutions for a practical policy problem,”* said Davis. His hope is that through this project, citizen values will be revealed, enabling JO CO to make more democratic decisions.

OSU is Oregon’s land grant university, and it has focused on rural issues since 1868 through its academic programs, agricultural experiment stations, and extension service offices. In 2001, OSU created the RSP to serve the needs of rural people and places. Brent S. Steel, Director and Professor, Public Policy Graduate Program, School of Public Policy, commented that, *“The RSP program is multi-disciplinary, teaches classes, conducts research, and provides extended education with faculty from many colleges at OSU. It is housed within the Department of Applied Economics.”*

What is the public safety issue? The issue is defined in many ways by the public (see web page), and is directly related to the reduction of federal payments to JO CO from the 2000 Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act, as it has been implemented since 2012.

The JS&PSS Exploratory Committee (Committee) was established by the Hugo Neighborhood Association & Historical Society in 2013 to research the public safety issue. The Committee asked the question, *“What can we do to shed some light on the issues?”* Two of its members, Mike Walker and Jon Whalen, decided to document “listening” which wouldn’t be scientific in

the sense of random sampling and targeted populations; it was just listening to fellow citizens. This strategy fit with one of their Committee's core beliefs, "All Citizens, Voters, Votes, And Values, Are Legitimate, Pro & Con." Their idea evolved and took the form of a "white paper" with the general purpose of informing readers, including sharing the Committee's philosophy on the matter. The paper is entitled, *Justice System & Public Safety Services Study Design: 2015 (Study Design)*, with the specific purpose of assisting readers to understand our public safety issue. Whalen feels that the first step is to understand and define the problem/issue. He commented, *You can't find solutions that last if you don't know the specific problems.*

Why support *Study Design*? Walker stated, *"In a nut shell it proposes a future Study which will be based on formal vetted inventories, and an impact methodology model which promotes informed decision-making through a unique long-range impact analysis process, where the citizens identify the problems and potential solutions - they are the decision-makers."* This definition of citizens is much narrower than the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* with its ruling that corporations are persons. *Study Design's* definition of the public does not include corporations, non-local special interests, agencies, government, or the media (e.g., reporter articles and editorial opinions in *The Grants Pass Daily Courier* (TGPDC), endorsements of the TGPDC Editorial Board, etc.). It does include news articles where the citizens' opinions are quoted. The idea is a *Study* focused on people, per *"We the People by whom and for whom our Constitution was established."* Supreme Court Justice Stevens, January 2010.

The *Study Design* approach relies on "people" citizens to provide insight about how to identify and manage problems, and formulate their own goals and solutions for the future (e.g., voting, writing letters-to-the-editor and guest opinions in the TGPDC, writing arguments in voters' pamphlets, etc.). Whalen emphasized, *"The importance to citizens of knowing they are being heard, of being the decision-makers that decide their future, is critical."* For example, the *Study's* alternatives that will be analyzed are the range of potential solutions the public, as a group, identified.

The focus on citizens as the decision-makers will be the core of Nathan's MPP paper, which is recording and analyzing the public's opinions, pro and con, across it range of values, through a "Content Analysis" research method. Bruce Weber, Director, Rural Studies Program, Oregon State University, concluded, *"The Rural Studies Program seeks to engage students and faculty at OSU in addressing problems and issues important to rural Oregonians. It is really good to see Nathan involved in this project. The resolution of this issue is critical to the well-being of the entire state."*

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