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No on 8 may mean cuts

By Steve Hooks
Of the Emerald

Voters will decide Tuesday whether to approve a \$10 million increase in Lane County's current \$4.2 million property tax base.

If voters reject the tax base, Measure 8 on the ballot, county officials say the county faces drastic cuts in all services.

The state constitution restricts yearly tax base increases to 6 percent or below without voter approval.

The rejection of the new tax base would force the county to implement a "contingency plan" that involves budget cuts in all departments and elimina-

tion of 287 county jobs, according to the plan.

County Commissioner Scott Lieuallen says voter rejection of the tax base and the resulting cuts mean a "real breakdown of local government."

Lieuallen adds that University students who plan to live in Lane County for a while should consider how rejection of the tax base would affect county services they might use.

The county's Community Health and Social Services (CHSS) department, which aids several agencies used by University students, would have to cut \$161,000 from 42 non-profit agencies, funded in part through joint social services, says John Kostenbauer, CHSS administrative assistant.

CHSS also would suffer cuts in its family planning, mental health and senior services, he says.

Among the non-profit agencies affected by CHSS cuts would be White Bird Clinic, Womenspace, Rape Crisis Network and Planned Parenthood, Kostenbauer says.

But county officials say basic services, such as law enforcement, would bear the brunt of

the cuts.

Sheriff David Burks said the county public safety department would lose 49 officers. His patrol division would be reduced to seven officers next year from his current 26, he said.

Burks said the department is "fast losing ability to respond" to calls. For example, Lane County parks could deteriorate due to crimes such as vandalism because his department wouldn't be able to patrol them as often, he said.

The 86 Lane County parks also would no longer be maintained by parks department crews as a result of budget cuts, according to the contingency plan.

Because the level of county services would be "unpredictable," the county's liveability may be reduced, and its economic growth stifled because businesses may be discouraged from locating here, Commissioner Otto T'Hooft says.

T'Hooft says the county's present financial situation stems from better days when the county had the surplus revenue from federal timber sales to offer more services.

Lane County receives about 15 percent of its total revenue from timber sales from federal lands formerly owned by the bankrupt Oregon and California Railroad (O&C), according to county figures.

Three years ago, O&C timber revenues filled county coffers, and "the county was spending every cent it was getting," T'Hooft says.

"There was such a cry for certain services that the services were added even if they benefited only a few people," T'Hooft says.

Last year, O&C timber revenues totaled about \$15 million. Now county officials estimate that timber revenues will drop to about \$6.2 million for the coming year.

T'Hooft and Lieuallen say they feel the public is aware of the county's need for a new tax base, and they expressed cautious optimism for its passage.

"I would have said eight weeks ago the tax base didn't have a chance. It's going to be close," T'Hooft says.

"We've been given a lot of opportunity to explain our case," Lieuallen says.

Under Measure 8, the county's share of property taxes would increase from 85 cents to \$2.28 for every \$1,000 of assessed value, according to county figures. These figures assume a 2 percent rise in assessed valuation before state property tax relief.

An owner of a \$60,000 home would pay approximately \$136 in property taxes to the county next year, according to county figures. This amount would be a \$90 increase over this year's county property taxes, according to county figures.

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