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AFTER THE ELECTION

County denied more prison beds

■ **LEVY:** City officials are searching for other ways to expand the county jail after Measure 20-84 failed to pass

By Ryan Maughn
Community Reporter

Measure 20-84, which failed Tuesday night because of low voter turnout, also contained a levy that would have allocated funds for the addition of 48 new beds to the Lane County Jail.

The levy was an attempt to combat the sharp escalation in prisoner release that Lane County has experienced over the last two years.

From 1987 until 1994, the number of prisoners that were released after having been convicted of their crimes was between 2000 and 4000 per year. The figure jumped in 1994, and by 1996, had reached 7,291. The Lane County Sheriff's Office has estimated that as many as 9,500 prisoners will be released in 1997.

Lt. Paul Satchel of the Lane County Sheriff's Office said the 1997 estimate appears to be accurate so far, with Lane County aver-

aging 820 releases per month.

County Commissioner Peter Sorenson said this represents a major problem for the community.

"The prisoner release is a threat to the community, and it is a public safety factor," he said.

According to Sorenson, the measure didn't pass because of the unrealistic parameters set by Measure 47 and the newly approved Measure 50, which contain the double-majority rule. The rule states that at least 50 percent of the Lane County populace needs to participate in the election and the majority of them need to approve it for the measure to pass. Only 43 percent voted in the Measure 20-84 election.

This election was not different, however, from any other special elections in regards to voter turnout, Sorenson said.

"In the last 20 years there was only one primary election that had over 50 percent of the population vote," he said. "The double majority rewards citizen apathy and is an anti-democratic program."

Sorenson agreed that the problem of releasing prisoners is signif-

icant, but he did not support the levy because he said the planning that went into its proposal was inadequate. According to Sorenson, the levy was not put into the measure until the last day possible, and it was not passed by the Public Safety Coordinating Council. The council is an inter-governmental review board that would have decided on the best way to spend the money raised by the levy to allow for the most benefits to public safety.

The county faces the question of what to do now that the measure has failed. Sorenson has proposed that the county commissioners select members for a task force that would decide what should be done in the long-term about the problem.

According to Sorenson, the funding for 48 new beds for the Lane County Jail will either come from the existing budget, which would force cuts in social programs, or from the money that Measure 40 will put back in the budget. If both possibilities fail to make the necessary funds available, the idea will be rejected.

Budget: Council rejects survey idea

■ Continued from Page 1

programs took the brunt of it."

Programs and services such as swimming pools, community centers and the Hult Center are the first on the chopping block. The library and ambulance, police and fire services were saved, Lee said.

While the council is prepared to move forward and make cuts, they are keeping the option open of introducing a new levy in November, Lee said. Any new property tax levy would still have to pass by a double majority.

Mayor Torrey said he is not supportive of introducing another tax measure in November until the legislature and courts have made decisions on the implementation of Measure 50.

"I don't see getting over 50 percent to come out and vote in November either," Torrey said. "So we would either have to come up with a different tax or wait until the national elections in 1998. I think we should go about the business of doing what we said we would do before the elections."

City Council members toyed with the idea of conducting a survey to get a better idea of what the voters wanted but decided against spending the \$3,500 the survey would cost.

City Council member Tim Laue said a survey would be impractical since the levy had passed by only 600 votes and the margin of error on any survey would be too large to give the council members any real indications of the voters' minds.

REVERSE RESTRICTIONS

■ Only property tax revenue can be used for city services. Other revenue is specifically reserved for services such as the airport and upkeep of roads. Of the \$38 million left in property tax revenue, \$31 million is budgeted for public safety. This leaves \$7 million for the other city services.

Mayor Torrey said with all of the confusion in the state regarding legislation right now, any city survey would be useless.

"If we ask the voters what they want, we are going to garbled information at best," Torrey said. "Everyone is confused by the measures, what they mean and what they will do."

The confusion continued when council members also found out that if Measure 50's double-majority rule is found unconstitutional in the courts, the city levy will be passed since it won the majority of the votes in the election.

Since the levy has a clause which allows it to be retroactively implemented, the levy will not have to go to the voters again but would be immediately adopted, Lee said.

However, this levy would depend on the courts and if the courts do not make a decision by November, city officials may propose a second levy, Lee said.

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