

Aumsville asks residents for input on police fee to preserve safe-city status

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The city of Aumsville is seeking input from residents as it mulls a police-service fee.

A public hearing on the issue is scheduled for the next Aumsville City Council meeting, 7 p.m. Monday, Nov. 13, at the Community Center, 555 Main St.

Police Chief Richard Schmitz outlined the fee recently, providing two rough options for what would be a flat, per-household charge. He said one option, \$.20 per day or \$1.40 per week would maintain the city's police services for the next five years. A second option of \$.40 per day or \$2.80 a week would enable the city to increase services, from the current 6 officers to 7.

City Administrator Ron Harding said depending on the option selected, the fee could generate an estimated \$66,000 to \$132,000 per year.

The idea actually surfaced within a good-news / bad-news scenario: the good news came through a SafeWise report issued in mid-October acknowledging Aumsville as the 4th safest city in Oregon; the bad news is the city's "forecast model" indicates that projected city budgets will not sustain the city's current level of police services.

Other Mid-Willamette Valley cities on the SafeWise list include: Mt. Angel, 6th; Silverton, 10th; Keizer, 13th; Monmouth, 14th; Dallas, 18th.

Aumsville's dilemma stems from finding a way to maintain its safety status near the top, and a police-fee seemed the most feasible approach.

"Basically (the idea) started with us evaluating sustainability of expenses for providing police coverage throughout the city," Harding said. "A comprehensive analysis of police funding showed us that in order to maintain services at the level where they are, we just didn't have enough money; they will go into the red next year."

Harding said a number of options have been explored, including reducing police staff or, as some communities have, contracting with the county sheriff's office. Either way, he said, service would be reduced.

One key factor in the city's consideration has been community feedback, specifically that residents have expressed the desire to maintain a comprehensive police force, and for that police force to be maintained locally.

But the budget forecast doesn't pencil out. "Our tax structure, the way set up, doesn't keep up

with inflation or the rising cost of providing services," Harding said.

"With tax dollars shrinking, and inflation (affecting) the cost of running the city, we are just outpacing ourselves," Schmitz agreed. "We have to find some sort of revenue to sustain our police force or be absorbed by the county."

The chief stressed that numbers make a difference, and the SafeWise report bears that out. He said two years ago Aumsville registered 21st on the list. About that time the city added one officer, bringing its full-time staff up to six, including Schmitz, along with an allotment for 10 reserves (7 reserve positions are currently filled).

The city's SafeWise position subsequently jumped 8 positions, improving to 13th a year ago, before climbing to its current status.

"They do make a difference," Schmitz said. "With a staff of six of us, most of the time there's one officer on duty. By the time we factor in vacations, training or sick days, things of that nature, we're struggling to maintain 24-hour coverage. If everybody is here, nobody's out sick or on vacation... We have 24-hour coverage."

Schmitz said factoring in all the personnel-depleting dynamics, roughly 10 percent of the time yearly the department doesn't have officer coverage. The higher end of the proposed fee, \$.40 per-day per household, would erase that 10 percent.

The police-service fee is not unique to Aumsville. Schmitz and Harding both said they researched other jurisdictions that have implemented similar fees, which are generally itemized separately but paid with the utility bill.

Keizer City Council approved a police fee last summer, and it was implemented just this month. That council also weighed the issue on a flat-fee basis, though it made some adjustments.

City of Keizer website noted that as of November 2017, it's "Police and Parks Services Fee" will be added to city services bills, charging single-family residential and non-residential locations \$8 per month; multi-family dwellings \$6.90 per month.

Turner also implemented a police fee years ago, but it's been adjusted over time to reflect the economic climate.

"Our fee history is up and down," Turner City Administrator David Sawyer said. "We implemented the fee back in 2008 to fund the 3rd officer position (the city) could no longer afford.

"When the recession happened, we had to make cuts



Aumsville City Council will hear public testimony regarding a police-service fee during its 7 p.m. Monday, Nov. 13, meeting at Chester Bridges Memorial Community Center, 555 Main St. Aumsville. JUSTIN MUCH | STAYTON MAIL

across the board as well as change our fees. That officer got cut and the fee went from \$9 a month to just \$1. We have kept it to provide the ongoing legal basis for future increases."

Silverton Police Chief Jeff Fossholm said his department has been fortunate enough to not have to explore a service fee. Stayton Police Chief Rich Sebens echoed that.

"Since I've been here as police chief, we have not looked into a police service fee, so I don't know how it would impact us at this time," Sebens said.

Schmitz said another funding option Aumsville examined was placing a levy before voters. But stability concerns steered them away from that idea.

"The problem with a levy is every five years you have to go out with a bond to get it passed," he said. "A service fee provides for more stability."

Harding said the city has already received some input on the idea from residents and welcomes more. That input will be delivered to the city council prior to its Nov. 13 meeting. The council will also take testimony at that meeting, but any decision about implementing a fee won't be made until December at the earliest.

"We'll summarize those (testimonies) we've received," Harding said. "The city accepts written testimony and comments from the public; (residents) can email it to someone at the city or come into the counter with something written or mail it."

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Detective solves 1979 cold case murder of woman

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More than 38 years after Janie Landers was brutally stabbed and beaten to death, an Oregon State Police detective was finally able to return a pair of earrings to her family and deliver the news they'd long waited to hear: He knew who killed the 18-year-old Salem woman.

"I'm really grateful and relieved that it's done," said Landers' sister Joyce Hooper. "She can be totally at peace now because her case is solved."

Landers was a patient at Fairview Training Center when she went missing March 9, 1979. Functioning at the level of an 8-year-old, Landers struggled with learning challenges and behavioral issues that led to her residency at the now-closed state-run facility in Salem.

Although some suspected Landers voluntarily walked away from the center, police still investigated her disappearance and spoke with the four employees who last saw Landers alive.

They had spotted an unfamiliar man in the area and his yellow or gold-colored vehicle. According to one witness, a large, pot-bellied man parked his car and crossed the street to talk to Landers.

The four witnesses worked with a Statesman Journal employee, who drew a composite sketch of the man.

Five days after her disappearance, Landers' body was found along a path near Silver Falls State Park.

An autopsy revealed she died from blunt force trauma to the head. She had multiple defensive wounds and deep cuts on her neck. An examination of her stomach contents led investigators to believe she died the day of her disappearance.

Investigation hit dead ends

Oregon State Police investigated and eliminated several suspects while chasing down leads. But with little physical evidence, the case remained unsolved and soon turned "cold."

Hooper was just 13 when her sister was killed. She doggedly followed the investigation and urged detectives to reopen the case.

Every few years, the investigation would be revived. Witnesses were re-interviewed, crime scene photos were re-examined and investigators would flip through stacks of police reports.

A clear suspect or theory of why Landers was killed never emerged.

Fast forward to March 2015, when Hooper again asked Oregon State Police to resurrect the investigation. She was 50; her father 82. She hoped to find justice for her sister while her father was still alive.

The case landed with OSP Detective Steve Hinkle, who began poring over hundreds of pages of police reports. He spoke with previous investigators and contacted any witnesses who were still alive.

At 5-feet-1-inch tall and 105 pounds, Landers was petite, but had a reputation for being feisty and unexpectedly strong.

Due to the nature of the brutal attack, Hinkle suspected her killer may have been injured during the stabbing.

"Janie clearly fought for her life," investigators had



Janie Landers MARION COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE



Above: Composite sketches of the suspect, Gerald Kenneth Dunlap, below. MARION COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE



noted.

The wounds were likely caused by a knife without a hilt, meaning her killer may have cut his hand while handling the weapon.

State police crime lab forensic scientists and detectives re-examined Landers' shirt and were able to find sections that might contain her killer's DNA. In April 2016, the crime lab confirmed a blood stain on the shirt matched a man's DNA.

Investigators soon discovered not only the man's identity — Gerald Kenneth Dunlap — but also his violent and predatory criminal past.

He had been convicted of raping a woman during an armed robbery in Tennessee in 1961 and sentenced to life in prison. He was paroled 12 years later.

Dunlap first moved to California where he was forced to register as a sex offender, then to Oregon, which at the time had no requirement for sex offender registration.

He married and soon found employment — at the Fairview Training Center.

Dunlap had not previously been identified as a suspect in Landers' murder. He worked as a laundry employee at the center until 1983, when he was fired for inappropriate behavior toward women.

District attorney's officials said at the time of Dunlap's hiring, nationwide criminal records were not reliable or common. Dunlap's coworkers likely would not have known about his violent past unless he'd self-reported.

In 1996, Dunlap was arrested for sexually abusing a minor female family member. Then-Deputy District Attorney Walt Beglau prosecuted Dunlap, who was found guilty by a Marion County jury and sentenced to prison.

He died there in January 2002.

But because he was convicted of a felony sex crime, Dunlap had been required to submit his DNA, which was still on file.

Detective wanted to be sure

The DNA match made Dunlap a strong suspect, prosecutors said, but Hinkle kept working to cement the connection and close the case.

Because Fairview closed in 2000, employee records were difficult to track down. The detective was able to find payroll records confirming that Dunlap was working at the training center the day Landers disappeared.

His job sorting laundry prior to washing made it highly improbable that his DNA could have transferred accidentally onto Landers' clothing and survived the washing process.

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