

Appeal Tribune

WEDNESDAY, JULY 1, 2020 | SILVERTONAPPEAL.COM

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Fire districts will make millions in budget cuts

Bill Poehler
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Fire districts and cities in the Mid-Willamette Valley are making budget cuts, including deciding on layoffs and furloughs, following voters' rejection of operating levy increases in the May election.

The levy failure for Marion County Fire District 1 means a \$2.4 million reduction in the department's operating budget, including \$1 million in budget cuts for the upcoming fiscal year that will take the form of laying off three people and other cuts in service.

Stayton won't have to make cuts yet for its city operating levy that helps fund Stayton Memorial Pool, Stayton Library and parks in the city as it has a year left on its existing levy, but is considering putting another levy on the November ballot.

The Stayton Rural Fire District won't have to make

cuts, but it will have to continue to rely on a dwindling pool of 50 volunteers, down from 60 a decade ago.

The measures looked like sure things when they were filed, but when the pandemic hit, it was too late to pull them from the ballot or modify them. And the general consensus is that taxpayers were uncertain of the future due to economic uncertainty decided against the increases.

"It's just bad timing," Stayton Rural Fire District Chief Jack Carriger said.

Stayton City Manager Keith Campbell agreed the timing was bad.

"I think we had internal discussions with the COVID issue and the uncertainty people had and people losing their jobs, it's a challenging time to go out and say hey, we need support on resources," Campbell said.

Marion County Fire District 1, which serves 55,000

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The Fire station located right next to the Chemeketa Community College Regional Training Center in Brooks on Wednesday, Dec. 5, 2018. Marion County Commissioners are looking at creating a special district for water in the unincorporated community of Brooks. MICHAELA ROMÁN / STATESMAN JOURNAL



A family wearing masks enters JC Penney as an unmasked group stands outside in Salem on Monday, June 22. BRIAN HAYES / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Face masks now mandatory

They are now required for shopping, dining, other activities in public spaces locally

Emily Teel and Bill Poehler
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Wearing a face mask is mandatory for anyone entering an indoor business in Marion or Polk County.

Businesses in Marion, Polk, Clackamas, Hood River, Lincoln, Multnomah and Washington Counties must require customers or patrons to wear a face covering – either a mask or a face shield – while inside under reopening guidelines by Gov. Kate Brown.

Face coverings have been recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention since

April. In an effort to slow transmission of the virus, the state is requiring them for businesses in counties where the number of confirmed or suspected cases has been high.

Businesses that must follow the guidelines include grocery stores, gyms, pharmacies, public transportation providers, restaurants and bars, retail stores including malls, ride sharing services or personal service providers such as barbers and tattoo parlors.

In addition, businesses in Marion and Polk also must require face coverings at swimming pools and spas, indoor entertainment venues like theaters and at indoor recreation sporting venues.

Exemptions are those under age 12, with medical conditions that make it hard to breathe while wearing a covering and those with a disability that prevents them from wearing one.

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Plan for isolation hotel riles city

Bill Poehler
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Marion County's plan to rent an 81-room hotel in Woodburn and use it as a short-term isolation facility for people who have tested positive for COVID-19 has raised concerns in the hard-hit community.

According to the city, the county plans to rent the Super 8 on Evergreen Road for those who have no other place to self-isolate, such as released inmates, farmworkers and homeless people.

The city wasn't informed ahead of time.

"Good government goes through a process for anything we do, especially in small towns," Woodburn City Councilor Eric Morris said. "To me, it feels much

more like, we're telling you this rather than can we come into your community and set up this isolation facility.

"That tunes up people's fears."

As of June 17, the 97071 ZIP code, which includes Woodburn, had 238 cases, the highest incidence in Marion County.

As a condition of Marion County moving into phase 2 of reopening on June 19, the county was required to find a facility for COVID-19 positive patients with mild symptoms who don't have anywhere to isolate.

As part of the county's plan, there will be an onsite nurse, a project manager and security personnel. Res-

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Audit: Inconsistent support for students with disabilities

Claire Withycombe
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Oregon kids with disabilities aren't consistently getting access to services and supports they need at school, state auditors say.

Federal law requires the state to provide public education to the thousands of Oregon students who have disabilities. Auditors with the Secretary of State's Office say the state's education department should improve how it coordinates and monitors those services.

"Children with disabilities who do not receive adequate services may have difficulties realizing their educational and life potential," auditors wrote.

Auditors recommended that the state take specific steps to improve special education services for both school age and very young children and to hire and retain special education staff.

Schools lack enough well-trained special education teachers and classroom assistants, said Joel Greenberg, a staff attorney for Disability Rights Oregon.

And even when teachers are well trained, their caseloads are often so high that they cannot provide enough individual attention to kids who need it, Greenberg said.

Greenberg also said the state doesn't adequately keep track of when there might be broader problems in a district.

"The state does not provide good expert support for districts that are struggling," Greenberg said. "And one of the reasons is, they don't monitor, in a useful enough way, to recognize when there are systemic problems in a particular district."

Auditors also recommended specific measures to help determine whether kids from historically underserved races or ethnicities are under- or over-identified for early intervention services and to improve data sharing in the K-12 system.

School funding still in question

Last year, lawmakers passed major legislation to boost money for schools. Even so, that \$1 billion annual cash infusion may not be enough to fully fund special education in the state, auditors said.

And the COVID-19 pandemic and its gut-punch to the economy could mean far less money available for schools.

The director of the Oregon Education Department, Colt Gill, said in a response to the audit that he expects that public money for schools will drop sharply, which could present barriers to implementing some of the audit recommendations.

Gill agreed or partially agreed with most of auditors' recommendations, but disagreed on some, such as having the department identify districts that struggle most to hire and retain special education staff and specialists.

Gill said that hiring and retaining staff is "firmly within local authority," and that ranking districts' challenges to hire and keep staff is "ill advised."

About 78,000 K-12 students experienced disabilities in the 2017-18 school year, or about 13.8% of Oregon students. In that same school year, about 12,000 Oregon infants, toddlers and preschoolers received special education services.

The share of kids who get adequate services in early childhood declines sharply when analyzed by need, auditors said.

Just 0.7% of high-needs infants, toddlers and preschoolers got an adequate level of support services from 2018 to 2019, while 6% of those children with moderate needs had their needs met, the report found. About 62% of low-needs young children, by contrast, got adequate services.

What the agency considers "adequate" hinges on the amount of time that specialists spend with young children, auditors said.

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Vol. 139, No. 28

Serving the Silverton Area Since 1880
A Unique Edition of the Statesman Journal



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