

# Town Hall Held to Discuss Impending Jail Closure *continued from front page*

voters approved and built a new \$13 million dollar, state-of-the-art jail in 1999, the intention was to return to the voters with a bond for operations. According to both Hyde and Heimuller, the original intention of the citizens committee that worked on the jail project was to operate the jail for a few years to establish costs and bed rental potential before returning to the citizens for an operating levy. Commissioner Hyde explained that, instead, the County received an additional \$2.4 million in discretionary budget funding through the "Secure Rural Schools" bill, which made it unnecessary to go back to the voters for more funding.

Hyde said that the hope of "Secure Rural Schools" was that timber harvests would increase throughout the northwest, and provide funding for local counties. The bill provided a declining scale of funding over six years. Hyde says that when additional timber harvests didn't happen, discretionary funding began shrinking. The bill was extended but has now sunset. The County only received \$400,000 last year from the program and will receive no funding this coming year.

Hyde went on to say that in 2008 the County discretionary fund was \$12.5 million; this past year it was \$6.2 million. "Our discretionary revenue has been cut in half," said Hyde. "And the Sheriff's Department is still getting 26%, but the General Fund discretionary revenue is 26% of a lot less money than it was."

When asked, Hyde told the audience that the current jail still has nine years until it has been completely paid for.

Commissioner Fisher told the audience that the jail is being run as efficiently as possible but needs to add sev-

mental choice we face is to close the jail and live within our budget or find some additional revenues. The solution to our problem is growth; economic development that will bring jobs and with that a tax base that will allow us to have the things we need."

oversees jail operations, told the audience that currently the jail has four posts they fill on a twenty-four hour basis: an officer in booking, a control room officer who opens all doors and moves inmates anywhere they need to go, and two roving deputies who control, manage, check on and count, and serve meals to all inmates. "No matter how many inmates we have, we need a minimum of that many people," explained Moyer. Right now we fill those posts with sixteen people and if you do the math on eight hour shifts we are already down to minimum staffing. Studies have shown we need twenty-four to twenty-five staff just for the level we are at now."

Heimuller noted that the old jail, which could house thirty-nine inmates, took more staff to operate the facility. "It took more people to run the jail in the old, archaic style, where you had to physically move people with deputies, than in this new, high tech jail. It's really impressive when you see the numbers and what is being done with such a limited number of staff."

Moyer responded, when asked what it would cost the County to rent ten beds in Polk County, that they were budgeting \$1.2 million dollars. Moyer noted that costs include the Department keeping two employees to manage prisoners, the cost to transport prisoners to

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*Undersheriff Andy Moyer and County Commissioners Earl Fisher, Tony Hyde and Henry Heimuller were in Vernonia for a Town Hall March 12.*

en employees to remain safe and within state and federal guidelines and regulations. "We have run on this thin ice for about as long as we can," said Fisher. "The costs are going up because we need to get back to where we are fully staffed." Hyde later noted that employees of the jail are currently looking for employment elsewhere because of the reality of the closure, and that it doesn't make sense to replace lost employees at this point.

Fisher went on to say, "There simply is no more money. The funda-

When asked about the cost for the levy to property owners, Heimuller handed out a flyer which showed the cost for a property assessed at \$150,000 would be \$87 per year; for a property valued at \$350,000 the levy would be \$203 per year. The levy is temporary and only set to run for four years; voters would need to reauthorize it to keep it going.

An audience member asked if the jail could be downsized and operated on a smaller scale in order to reduce costs. Moyer, who is the jail commander and

## Register Now for the Vital Vernonia Community Forum

The Vernonia community is invited to attend a Community Forum to learn about the recently completed Vital Vernonia Indicator Project and discuss opportunities to strengthen Vernonia's vitality.

This Community Forum will be held on April 5 from 9:00 AM to 2:30 PM at the Vernonia Schools, in the Library. A light breakfast will be served at 8:30. Lunch is included. This is a free event. Registration is required by March 31.

The forum, sponsored by The Ford Family Foundation and The Ford Institute for Community Building, is an exciting opportunity to gather with fellow community members to

share ideas and dialog about the future of Vernonia.

Participants will learn about the Vital Vernonia Indicator Project results in the five targeted areas of study: economy, health and well-being, youth and education, livability and community engagement, and environment and natural resources.

The forum will include time for networking and dialog to build a shared understanding of what the results of the Indicator Project mean for Vernonia as well as identify individual and collective opportunities to strengthen Vernonia's vitality.

The Vital Vernonia Indicator Project is a collaboration between Oregon State University Extension Service and the community of Vernonia and was designed to quantify and measure the well being of the Vernonia community. By examining, recording and tracking indicators of vitality over time the community can now measure progress towards goals to improve well being and identify areas for targeted community action or investment.

For more information contact Alexis at [amillett@nonprofitoregon.org](mailto:amillett@nonprofitoregon.org) or call 503-239-4001, ext 115. Register online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/VitalVernonia>.

### Vernonia Weather February 2014

	HIGH	LOW	PRECIP
1	47	27	0
2	47	27	0
3	39	21	0
4	30	20	0
5	29	18	0
6	20	17	.25
7	20	17	.23
8	29	26	.55
9	36	27	T
10	41	32	.37
11	46	32	.27
12	53	35	.15
13	52	33	.52
14	51	23	.05
15	49	34	.95
16	49	34	1.49
17	50	34	.42
18	47	31	1.05
19	45	30	.22
20	45	35	.15
21	47	28	0
22	48	28	0
23	47	30	T
24	50	40	.05
25	52	42	0
26	51	30	0
27	43	33	.04
28	61	30	0

Ave/Tot 43.8 28.9 6.76

Weather data is collected at the U.S. Weather station at the Vernonia Water Plant

#### HOW TO SEND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Vernonia's Voice welcomes and requests your thoughts, opinions and ideas. Please include your name, address and phone number, limit your letters to 300 words or less. Vernonia's Voice reserves the right to edit, omit, respond or ask for a response to letters submitted. We will print letters space permitting. Deadline is the 1st and 3rd Monday of each month. Email: [scott@vernoniasvoice.com](mailto:scott@vernoniasvoice.com) or mail to: Letters, PO Box 55, Vernonia, OR 97064.

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Get all your Garden Essentials at the 1st Annual Vernonia Community Garden Fair & Plant Sale May 10th 9am-4pm at the Vernonia School Commons 1,000 Tomato Plants, vegie & flower starts plus many gifts for Mother's Day Interested in being a vendor? Contact Penny Costley 503-429-0196