

School board facing multiple challenges

By SCOTT JORGENSEN
IVN Staff Writer

Financial uncertainties and difficult union negotiations could cause potential complications when the Three Rivers School District (TRSD) Budget Committee meets on Monday, May 11 to try and work on its figures for the 2009-10 fiscal year.

The public meeting will begin at 7 p.m. at district administrative office, 8550 New Hope Road in Murphy.

Like nearly every school district in Oregon, TRSD relies on state dollars for a substantial portion of its funding. But legislators are eyeing a shortfall of at least \$4.4 billion, which could lead to cuts in service at the local level.

The state's next revenue forecast is scheduled to be released on Friday, May 15. Once those numbers are made public, school districts throughout the state will have a better sense of what level of support to expect from Salem.

"We know we're going to have to make substantial cuts," said TRSD Board Chairman Dave Strahan. "This is the time to start the discussion within the Budget Committee as to what those may look like."

Strahan said that the board has asked district staff

to assemble varying budget scenarios for preliminary consideration.

"I assume we will be looking at those," he said.

Said fellow board member Phil Stephens, the plan is to "have several different approaches, given the wide range of figures that we're going to have to work with."

While district officials brace for potentially devastating cuts, negotiations continue with representatives from the teachers' union. Strahan said that negotiations are still informal at this point, but haven't gone well so far.

"We're not on the same page yet, that's for sure," he said. "But we're still talking, and that's the good news."

One particular sticking point involves Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA) for teachers.

"I think there are some expectations coming from the leadership that are going to be difficult for us to agree to," Strahan said. Stephens agrees that union representatives have put district officials in quite a tough spot.

"I don't think they're willing to give anything up," Stephens said. "They're willing to give up 10 (school) days, but what that does is end up hurting the students."

One issue being discussed in negotiations is the possibility of making all TRSD's extracurricular activities self-supporting for a year by cutting funds for music and athletic programs. But the district and its board may be reluctant to take such an approach.

"I'm personally not in favor of that, if we can avoid it at all," Strahan said.

Cutting extracurricular activities could be devastating to a district that's already struggling with declining student enrollment, he added.

"In my opinion, that would exacerbate the problem," Strahan said. "They would flee the district in droves if the districts near us have those programs."

Stephens said that such reductions would be unlikely to save the district much money anyway.

"I think for the most part, the district isn't putting a lot of dollars into those areas," he said. "A lot of those are funded by parent organizations that help to raise money and do all of that."

But despite all those underlying issues, there may be hope for TRSD in the form of legislation working its way through the state capitol.

House Bill 2558 would

allow a school to qualify as a remote, small elementary school for the purpose of weighting in the state school fund distribution formula. That bill passed through the House Education Committee on April 22 with a do-pass recommendation and was later referred to the House Revenue Committee. That body held a public hearing on HB 2558 on Friday, May 1.

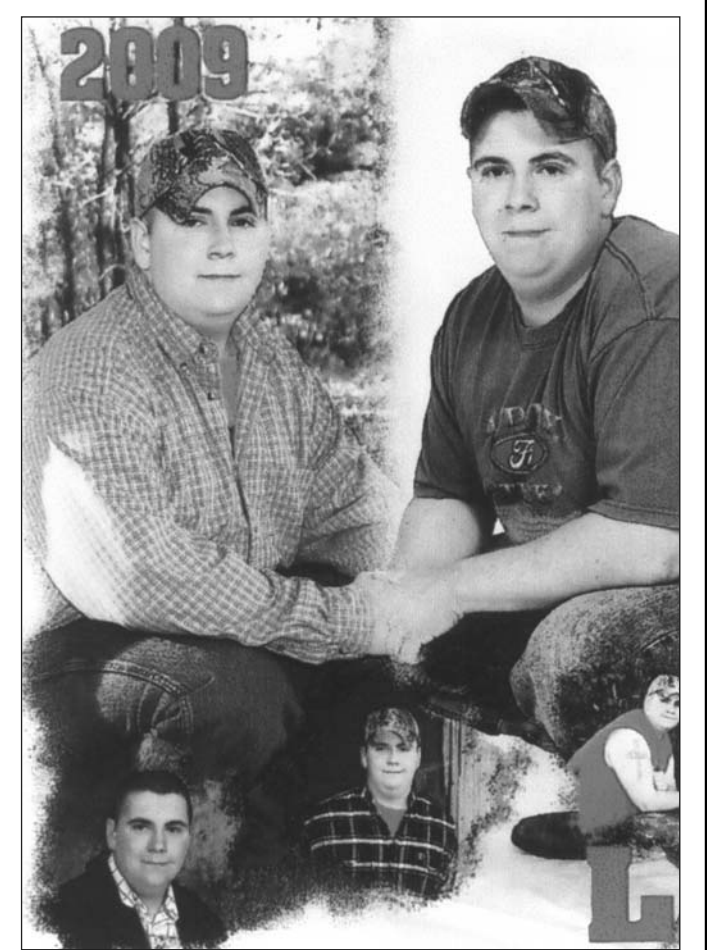
Strahan said that the bill might enable TRSD to save some of its smaller schools. A Right-sizing Committee put together by the district has recommended closing a few community schools to counter the district's continued revenue problems.

"That would relieve a lot of the pressure on Applegate and Williams moving forward," he said. "It would also make us revisit Wolf Creek."

Overall, the immediate challenges facing TRSD don't keep Strahan from being optimistic about the future.

"I think at the end of the day, hopefully, it won't be as bleak as it looks at this moment," Strahan said. "We have to do the best we can with the information we have, and see how it goes."

Campus Achiever



L.J. Winters

Leonard James (L.J.) Winters will graduate with honors from Lockwood High School on May 17, 2009. L.J. attended Evergreen Elementary School until 1999, when he moved to Missouri with his family. He will enter Northeastern Oklahoma A.M. College in the fall of 2009 where he will be studying Animal Sciences.

Endangered species rule restored

A so-called "11th-hour Bush administration rule that undermined Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections" is being revoked, said U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke and Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar.

Their decision requires federal agencies to again consult with federal wildlife experts at the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration – the two agencies that administer the ESA – "before taking any action that may affect threatened or endangered species."

"By rolling back this 11th-hour regulation, we are ensuring that threatened and endangered species continue to receive the full protection of the law," Salazar opines. "Because science must serve as the foundation for decisions we make, federal agen-

cies proposing to take actions that might affect threatened and endangered species will once again have to consult with biologists at the two departments."

Claims Locke, "For decades, the Endangered Species Act has protected threatened species and their habitats. Our decision affirms the administration's commitment to using sound science to promote conservation and protect the environment."

In March, President Obama directed the secretaries to review the previous administration's Section 7 regulation of the ESA. It governs interagency consultation. And Congress, in the 2009 Omnibus Appropriations Act, specifically authorized the secretaries to revoke the regulation.

Locke and Salazar said that the two departments will conduct a joint review of the 1986 consultation regulations

to determine if any improvements should be proposed.

ESA was signed into law in 1973 to protect imperiled species from extinction, as well as conserve the ecosystems and habitats necessary for their survival.

According to a news release, "NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources."

"The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service works to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. It is a leader and trusted partner in fish-and-wildlife conservation, known for its scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service."

Some JoCo budgets OK'd

By SCOTT JORGENSEN
IVN Staff Writer

Fiscal 2009-10 budgets for a few county agencies were approved by the Josephine County Budget Committee during its Tuesday, April 28 meeting at Anne G. Basker Auditorium in Grants Pass.

Clerk & Recorder Art Harvey told the committee that his office began reorganizing in July 2008. A cross-training program has been instituted, he said, which has enabled the department to leave one position unfilled. That will save it more than \$80,000 throughout the next two years, Harvey reported.

There has been a recent uptick in activity at the clerk and recorder's office, Harvey said. He added that recordings have increased due to several residents refinancing their mortgages and that home sales are up slightly.

Assessor Connie Roach said that her office receives approximately 33 percent of

its funding from the state, and most of that comes from the County Assessment Function Funding Assistance (CAFFA) grant program.

Because there is a May 1 deadline to apply for the CAFFA grant, the budgets for the clerk, assessor and treasurer's offices needed to be approved prior to that date. County Chief Financial Officer Rosemary DeLashmutt told Budget Committee members that the county commissioners had a resolution pending for their Wednesday, April 29 weekly business session to apply for the CAFFA grant.

That grant is for more than \$400,000, she said.

DeLashmutt recommended that the committee approve those departments' budgets. Vice Chairman Dave Toler moved to approve the budgets, and Commissioner Sandi Cassanelli seconded. That motion passed 5-0, as Dwight Ellis was absent.

CJ to pursue public drinking ban

(Continued from page 1)

want this to drag on, go through hearings and waiting periods any longer than we have to. We've already had hearings on this thing," Moore said. "Because it's been forestalled for so long, everyone already knows

about it, so there's been enough notice."

Of particular importance to the mayor is getting the ordinance passed prior to the summer tourist season because, "We don't want to lose any business here."

"If we put it in effect

immediately, we can see if that will take care of part of the problem that we have," he said.

Maurer said that he is just happy to have helped some of his constituents.

"The system worked, and we didn't need to pass an-

Toler blasts budget perceptions

(Continued from page 1)

We were for so many years. I have to understand that."

Toler said that the county also has earned a reputation for excessive spending of federal dollars, but that it is no longer the case.

"We're still getting federal dollars, but saving a ton of it," Toler said. "That's why we've been able to do a three-year plan. We've been saving those dollars for the last two to three years in particular."

During recent county

budget hearings, some citizens asked if there is a long-term plan for funding. Toler said that any solution should involve the federal government, since that entity owns most of the land in the county.

"We have a three-year plan, but beyond those three years, we're trying to work diligently with our federal legislators," Toler said. "The bottom line is, we have to be able to know that the federal forest is going to supply economic activity and funding for the county three years from now more than it has for the last 16 years or so."

"That has to be part of the plan, frankly."

Toler said that the county also is engaging in some economic development projects. One could potentially draw a call center to the area, which would create 50 jobs immediately and 150 within the next

few years, he said.

"We're doing what we can to woo them to Josephine County," Toler said. "I'm doing what I can to offer any kind of incentives I can to get them here."

Biomass projects also are being pursued by the county, he said.

"With the push and move towards renewable energy, that market is going to grow," the commissioner stated.

Toler said that between better spending practices and an emphasis on economic development projects, Josephine County officials hope to demonstrate that they are doing their best to serve the public.

"We have to earn that respect back from the citizens," he said. "You don't do it overnight. It's going to take years to earn that respect back."

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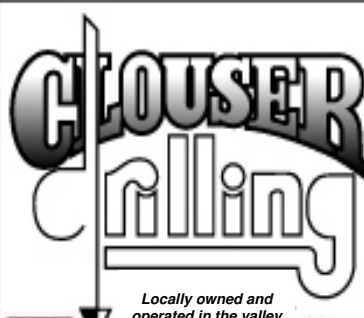
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Brunch for lunch, chicken nuggets, pepperoni or veggie pizza, turkey salad sandwich, chicken salad wrap, chef or garden salad.
FRIDAY, MAY 8
Nachos, cheeseburger, Italian griller, totally turkey sandwich, classic wrap, Cobb or garden salad.
MONDAY, MAY 11
Crispy corn dog, hamburger, Rib-B-Que sandwich, totally turkey sandwich, cleaver club wrap, garden salad.
TUESDAY, MAY 12
Big beef taco Tuesday, popcorn chicken, pepperoni or cheese pizza, super duper sub, crispy chicken wrap, chef or garden salad.
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