

A closer look at the county budget

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What is our county’s General Fund? Is this just a pot of “extra” money being withheld from public scrutiny?

No. Not at all.

As reported in the Aug. 31, 2016 edition of the *Illinois Valley News*, our county budget is made up of a hodgepodge of funding sources. Most of these can be used only for specific purposes, but some are flexible. Property taxes received by the county are an example of a flexible source.

It’s important to note that only a small percentage of the property taxes we pay go to the county. If you’re a property owner, take a look at your tax bill. Most of that check you write goes to Three Rivers School District, the Illinois Valley Fire Department, and the city of Cave Junction if you’re in those city limits, and so on.

At any rate, the small amount received by the county will eventually find its way to the sheriff’s department and other county departments. But first it gets deposited into the General Fund. The same goes for other flexible sources; the first stop on the way to their ultimate destinations is always the General Fund.

Think of depositing your entire paycheck into the household checking account. Then you take out smaller amounts of cash and stick them into envelopes labeled rent, food, utilities, entertainment, etc. That household checking account is your General Fund.

Another source of flexible monies you will find in the General Fund are revenues generated by county departments. For example, in 2016 the county’s Forestry Department brought in \$1.0

million, mostly from sales of timber. Other departments that brought in significant amounts of money were the county clerk which brought in \$531,000 mainly from recording fees, and the assessor, which brought in \$399,000 primarily from state grants.

A third category in the General Fund is interfund transfers. These are transfers of monies between county departments. Here’s an example: This year the county budgeted a transfer of \$78,000 from Economic Development to the Planning Department, to cover the cost of the new community development director plus operational support. That transfer shows up in the General Fund.

The Internal Services Fund (ISF) is another main budget category that can be a source of confusion.

In fiscal year 2016-17 the ISF budget was \$4.4 million. Internal services fall into two categories. One category is centralized administrative services the county provides to all county departments to avoid the duplication of expenses if each department were to “outsource” its contracts. A couple of examples are information technology services and legal services. Another category is services that cannot easily be allocated to just one department or cost center.

Each of the various county departments pays approximately 10 percent of its budget into the ISF.

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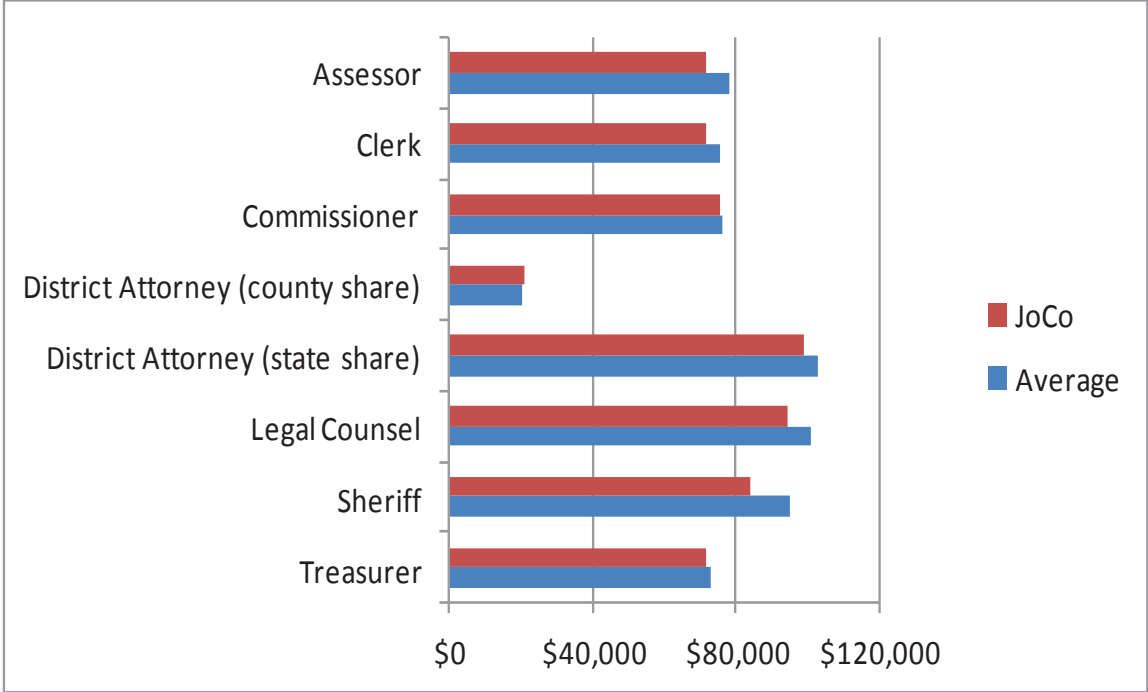
Dangerously beautiful



(Photo by Dan Mancuso, *Illinois Valley News*)

The Gold Canyon Fire from the north shore of Lake Selmac Tuesday, Aug. 30. According to a press release, the Oregon Department of Forestry declared the 61-acre fire near Selma 100 percent contained Sept. 6. No structures were lost or damaged in this fire. The cause of the fire is still under investigation.

How does JoCo officials’ pay stack up?



Comparison counties: Benton, Coos, Douglas, Klamath, Linn, Polk, Umatilla, Yamhill, Lincoln.

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How do the amounts we pay to our county commissioners and other top county officials compare to those of other counties? Good question, and it so happens that the county’s Human Resources Department (HR) has an answer. Every year, HR looks at the salaries paid by nine other counties that are similar to ours in terms of population and household income to determine where our own salaries should be. In 2016 the average county commissioner salary among those nine counties was \$76,490. We paid our commissioners \$75,392, just a tad below the average. See the chart, *Salary Comparisons*, for salary comparisons for other top county officials. County Human Resources Director JJ Scofield is adamant about the importance of research to back up salary decisions.

“What’s important to me is accuracy. I don’t really care about the political nature of the decision.”
“Until this year, elected officials hadn’t had a cost of living adjustment in seven years. That’s the longest of any county in the entire state. And the reason is that the decision for salary adjustment, especially with the elected officials, is inherently political.”
“I am a big fan of numbers. And I think you need to make the cost of government accurate. If you have a cop, this is what a cop makes. And based on your budget, you can afford this many cops. You should pay people what the market value for their position is. I think if you undervalue things you tend to get what you pay for.”
“That being said, you also shouldn’t overpay. I’ve been with the county for three years, and I’ve advocated for the policy that positions should be raised if they’re undervalued, and should be lowered if they’re overvalued. And I’ve made decisions on both sides of that.”

City questions use of Glyphosate

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At their monthly meeting, Monday, Sept. 12, the Cave Junction City Council began a discussion on alternatives to using certain herbicides in the city’s roadside vegetation maintenance strategy. The council also spent considerable time discussing citizen complaints regarding a property on Old Stage Road, which actually lies outside of city jurisdiction.

Councilor John Gardiner brought up the herbicide issue during last month’s meeting after he learned that city workers had sprayed glyphosate, i.e. Roundup, on roadside vegetation on East River Street. At his behest, the topic was added to this month’s agenda. At the request of citizens, the council last year adopted a resolution to become a “Bee-Safe City,” and, as Gardiner sees it, the spraying of certain herbicides is not consistent with that resolution.

The council reviewed the

city’s current roadside vegetation maintenance practice, which involves mechanically reducing vegetation by means of mowers, weed eaters, chainsaws and excavators, and then spraying an approved herbicide to prevent re-growth. Currently, a crew of four city employees does this work over the course of four to six weeks every spring. Travis Robbins, the lead maintenance operator for the city of Cave Junction, cautioned the council, via letter, that “if the city crew is to maintain ‘Right of

Way’ vegetation without the use of an approved herbicide, the crew will need to revisit the areas two to three additional times a season to control re-growth.” He added, “I do believe that it is possible to control Right of Way vegetation without the use of herbicide, but not without consideration to current staffing or budget levels.”

Councilor Dan Bosch suggested that the city look into using an acetic acid based, organic herbicide that, in tests, has performed almost as well as

Roundup. The downside, according to Bosch, is that this product costs \$26 per gallon, which is significantly more expensive than Roundup.

“It is interesting that we are talking about money,” Councilor Gardiner commented at this point. “What is the monetary value of not endangering the children and animals that live in this area? The World Health Organization has declared glyphosate a possible carcinogen,” he added. “This is no joke.”

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