

WHY CARE ABOUT THE COUNTY COMMISSION?

BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN

The five member Lane County Commission administers the approximately \$450 million that federal, state and local taxpayers provide to Lane County, South Lane Commissioner Pete Sorenson tells *EW*.

Votes by the five-member Board of Lane County Commissioners affect people in 12 cities and 4,620 square miles of land from the mountains to the coast, and the votes affect issues from law enforcement to road maintenance. Sorenson says the County Commission also acts as the board of health and as such makes decisions about how we deal with communicable diseases, sexually transmitted diseases, needle exchanges and more. He says the board is currently debating raising the age for buying tobacco in Lane County from 18 to 21.

The County Commission also deals with solid waste, parks, the jail and public safety, and urban growth boundaries for cities. If someone from the state Legislature resigns then the board appoints the next legislator, which affects state-level politics.

Hate rural roadways? County roads and bridges fall under the purview of the board. Do you think there are not enough sheriffs policing the county? That's an issue the

County Commission deals with. Your rural road floods each winter? The smoking ban in parks? The end of Faerieworlds at Pisgah? The fact Eugene's source of drinking water, the McKenzie River, has weak protections from septic tanks too close to its waters? The lack of animal control officers in the county? Those are all contentious issues that have come before the Lane County Commission.

Unlike the Eugene city councilors who are part-time with a small stipend, county commissioners are full-time paid positions with recently raised salaries of \$84,457 a year. Instead of a city manager, the county has an administrator, Steve Mokrohisky, who makes \$182,510 annually.

The board of commissioners meets most Tuesdays at Harris Hall in the Lane County Public Service Building, 125 E. 8th Avenue. Public comments start shortly after the meetings start around 9 am. The County Commission meets other days and times too, and you can find those on its online calendar goo.gl/aFYMw2. You can also give public comments via snail mail and email. Go to goo.gl/dj3FK for how to do that as well as for a list of boards and commissions you can participate in.

"It's a good way to put your foot in the pond without jumping in," Sorenson says of the volunteer positions.

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