

County budget includes fee increases

Spending plan expands total by 13 percent

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian



Lianne Thompson

Cameron Moore

The Clatsop County Board of Commissioners voted 4-1 Wednesday to adopt a sizable budget increase for the second consecutive year.

The budget for the fiscal year that begins Saturday totals \$65.1 million, a roughly 13 percent increase from this year. Last year, commissioners increased the budget by 10 percent.

More than half of this year's increase is a result of money transfers and increased contingency funds. Other increases will go toward personnel services and special projects. Property taxes connected to funds in the budget will remain the same as last year.

Stable tax and timber revenues have allowed the county

to enhance services, increase staffing and focus on special projects, Budget and Finance Director Monica Steele said.

"The county is in a good financial position and continues to monitor that situation," Steele said.

The new budget allocates 49 percent of resources to public safety systems such as the Sheriff's Office and Emergency Management. It will increase staffing in the Sheriff's Office as well as funding toward alternative custody programs.

Commissioners also unanimously approved a series of fee increases based on an annual review of county departments. Services from

community development, public health and wastewater management will all see fee hikes.

The \$9 fee hikes for most planning permits and reviews will fund the salary of a new permanent technician. Meanwhile, public health will be able to account for the increasing number of businesses asking for licenses, and wastewater management has not been subject to increases since the county assumed those responsibilities within the last decade, Steele said.

Special projects such as an additional road near the future site of the North Coast Business Park and construction of a household hazardous waste facility will also benefit from the increases, she said.

Commissioner Lianne Thomson, the sole "no" vote, said she did not see enough emphasis on housing issues, economic development and emergency preparedness. She also lamented what she considered a lack of inclusion of

commissioners in the budgeting process.

"I look at the process we have, and I have concerns," Thompson said. "When I look at the product, I don't see what I think is the appropriate focus on these critical issues. In my mind, the process that we have doesn't allow us the ease or the flexibility or the time to tease out how to raise those community issues."

County Manager Cameron Moore said he "couldn't disagree more."

"I do think the budget reflects community priorities, but I also think we have to practice prudent fiscal management because this is other people's money that we're spending," Moore said. "Within the resources we have, we certainly try to do what we can, and if there was clear direction from the majority of the board saying, 'We want different priorities,' those are the priorities we would work on."

GOP cries foul over attempt to push a vote on provider tax to January special election

State Democrats want to ensure Medicaid funded

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Democrats in the Legislature are trying to force a special election in January if petitioners are successful in putting the recently passed health care provider tax on the ballot for a statewide vote.

While Democrats say they are trying to pre-empt a Medicaid funding crisis, the attempt prompted ire from state Rep. Julie Parrish, R-Tualatin/West Linn.

In Oregon, voters can gather signatures to refer non-emergency legislation for a vote in the general election. After the final gavel falls on the legislative session, petitioners have 90 days to file a petition with the Secretary of the State's Office to refer legislation to the ballot.

A proposed amendment to Senate Bill 229 would schedule a special election for January on referrals from this session, rather than wait for the November general election in 2018. It would also transfer responsibility for writing ballot titles from the Attorney General's Office to a bipartisan legislative committee.

Rep. Dan Rayfield, D-Corvallis, says that holding a special election next January would give the Legislature time to find a resolution in the event the health care provider tax, designed to pay for Medicaid by assessing hospitals, insurers and coordinated care organizations, is struck down by voters.

While several Senate Republicans voted in favor of the tax last week, it first faced a tougher battle in the House of Representatives, narrowly meeting the required three-fifths majority vote with one Republican's approval. Parrish voted against it, and argues that Democrats didn't consider an alternative funding plan for Medicaid.

Less than two weeks before legislators meet again and balance the budget, Parrish argued that the move could affect other controversial reve-



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

A provider tax on hospitals will help close the state's budget deficit.

nue-raising measures that could be passed by legislators, namely a proposed transportation package that includes increases to the gas tax, and another proposal that would collect more revenues by restructuring small-business taxes.

Parrish cast the proposed amendment as a partisan move to reduce turnout and potentially impact the results.

"Our Constitution allows voters the right to petition their government in a fair and equitable manner," Parrish wrote in an email Tuesday night. "The regularly scheduled general election is when the widest population of voters turn out for an election. The net effect of bypassing the general election is akin to voter suppression."

Precedent

But a January special election on a referral is not without precedent. A special election was held in January 2010 as a referendum on two tax increases passed by the Legislature in 2009.

That year, Measure 66 and Measure 67 were approved by voters and took effect in late February.

However, Paul Gronke, a professor of political science

at Reed College and director of the Early Voting Information Center, said he did not see "any particular partisan advantage" in putting tax measures on the ballot in a special election.

Gronke wrote in an email Wednesday that January voters are "committed voters and more partisan voters, and in general, those voters are older, higher income, better educated and in Oregon, lean more conservative (in the context of a very liberal state overall)."

Oregon already has a system for assessing certain urban hospitals based on their net revenues. The legislation passed last week would maintain that assessment and create a .7 percent tax on those urban hospitals, start an assessment on rural hospitals, and create a tax on insurance premiums.

The new taxes are poised to raise more than \$600 million in the next two years and draw down nearly \$1.9 billion in federal funding to help pay for the Oregon Health Plan, Oregon's version of Medicaid. It would also help reduce a \$1.4 billion gap between projected revenues and expenses in the state's upcoming two-year budget.

Rayfield said that if voters reject the tax at the ballot box, the Legislature could address the Medicaid shortfall in its monthlong session in February.

Ballot titles

Under the proposed amendment, the Legislature, through a committee with membership from both parties and from both the House and Senate, would have say over writing the ballot title, according to Rayfield.

The Attorney General's Office writes ballot titles.

Parrish sees it differently. The proposed amendment specifies the ballot title-writing committee would include two members from the majority party and one member from the minority party from each chamber.

"To usurp the ballot titling authority from the Attorney General, and redistribute that power to the Legislature for partisan purposes (is) wholly unacceptable, and voters should be allowed to weigh in on that decision as well," Parrish wrote.

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

Busy county roads to get a face-lift

A \$500,000 project kicks off this summer

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

More than 2 1/2 miles of often-used Clatsop County roads will be paved this summer.

The nearly \$500,000 project approved unanimously by the Board of Commissioners on Wednesday will include repaving sections of Ridge Road in Warrenton, Old Highway 30 in Knappa, Walluski Loop Road and the adjacent Labiske Lane intersection south of the Clatsop County Fairgrounds.

Bayview Transit Mix was awarded the contract for the project. Hot mix asphaltic concrete will be applied to the roads to account for factors such as current pavement conditions and traffic volume.

Last year, Walluski Loop Road served as a detour during repairs at a nearby

section of state Highway 202. Two small areas of the road that were already in need of repaving were further damaged during the heavier traffic flow. The nearby Labiske Lane intersection has been in need of maintenance for several years and has seen increases in heavy truck traffic, Senior Administrative Supervisor Teresa Clute wrote in a document presented to commissioners.

Old Highway 30 will be repaved from Maggie Johnson Road to Little Creek. The steep, curvy road has developed potholes due to recent oiling projects, and the paving will aid heavy truck traffic, Clute wrote.

The Ridge Road repairs, due to outdated paving, will stretch from Southwest Ninth Street to Peter Iredale Road.

The paving project, while not entirely unusual in scope, is one of the larger ones the county will agree to this year, County Manager Cameron Moore said. Road work is expected to be completed by September.

County invests in ankle bracelets for alcohol monitoring

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

People ordered by Clatsop County Circuit Court not to consume alcohol will be required to wear ankle bracelets in the near future that track possible violations.

The county Board of Commissioners unanimously approved a contract Wednesday that will allow the Sheriff's Office to kick-start the program. It will likely be implemented by August, Lt. Kristen Hanthorn said.

"That's something we've been lacking," she said. "It's been an ask by our judges and our treatment courts."

Daily costs to the Sheriff's Office for using the product total more than \$25,000 per year, according to estimates given by services contractor Vigilnet America LLC.

The Sheriff's Office currently relies on urine tests to track offenders. Urine tests are sometimes passable with proper timing regardless of recent alcohol consumption. The bracelets automatically analyze body sweat every 30 minutes to ensure compliance.

Offenders both inside and outside of the county jail will be required to wear them, Hanthorn said.

Ocean Park man arrested on online child porn charge

EO Media Group

OCEAN PARK, Wash. — An Ocean Park, Washington, man was arrested earlier this month for "possession of depictions of minors engaged in sexually explicit conduct," according to the Pacific County Sheriff's Office.

The arrest of Joshua S. Brown, 19, resulted from an FBI investigation. An FBI special agent told local authorities that an online child pornography-sharing investigation appeared to involve a computer IP address on the 29000 block of R Street of Ocean Park. The FBI investigation allegedly revealed several images and videos depicting adult males having

sexual intercourse with young females.

Joining forces with the FBI, a sheriff's investigator served a search warrant in January at the residence. Three occupants at the residence were interviewed. The FBI seized a computer for forensic analysis.

On June 13, the FBI provided the Sheriff's Office with evidence allegedly obtained from the computer, including a CD/DVD containing several images depicting adult males who appeared to be engaging in intercourse with female minors. The CD allegedly also contained hundreds of other images that were classified as child pornography.

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