

Grant County still grappling with \$800K shortfall

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

CANYON CITY — Grant County officials continue to grapple with potential cuts in the wake of an \$800,000 “miscalculation” discovered in the midst of deliberations in the 2022-23 budget.

During a contentious session of the Grant County Court on May 18, County Treasurer Julie Ellison presented multiple options for attempting to rebalance the budget.

One option, Ellison said, would be to cut all general fund and elected county employees to 36 hours a week. The savings, she said, would work out to roughly \$145,000 a year. If the county were to cut those positions to 32 hours a week, the savings would work out to \$289,000.

An unidentified county employee said that would not come close to filling the \$800,000 hole in the county’s general fund.

Department heads and county employees expressed their frustration with the County Court over the county’s unsettled financial status.

District Attorney Jim Carpenter told the court that he is not confident that the county knows where it stands financially.

He said he makes a budget every month for his home



Grant County District Attorney Jim Carpenter, in the left photo, and Eric Julsrud, Grant County’s watermaster, on the right, address the county court on May 18, 2022. Grant County officials are considering potential cuts in the wake of an \$800,000 shortfall in the 2022-23 budget.



Photos by Steven Mitchell/Blue Mountain Eagle

and did the same thing for his small business when he had one. He said he could walk downstairs and show the court a printout of his department’s budget, including how much money the department has and what was spent. He is not confident the county could do the same. Given that, he said, it would be irresponsible of the county to ask departments to make

cuts or make any other decisions when they do not know how much money they have to work with. “If you don’t know where you are,” Carpenter said, “you don’t know where you can go.” Carpenter also said he would like to see where the County Court could make cuts in its own department budget. (County Judge Scott

Myers has said in the past that the court has made significant cuts to its travel budget and that he has not been turning in requests for mileage reimbursement.) Myers began the meeting by acknowledging that the budget problems have caused some “consternation” in the Grant County Courthouse lately and by asking those in the courtroom to show one

another respect. “If we treated our families the way we’ve been treating each other as a family lately they would be breaking up,” he said. County Commissioner Jim Hamsher suggested that, since the county does not have to adopt a budget until June 30, the county’s department heads come back with recommended cuts to their

budgets by the next County Court session. County officials have been wrestling with the \$800,000 budget shortfall since May 2, when Ellison sent an email to the three county court members and the three citizens who together make up the county’s budget committee. Ellison wrote that she had come across a miscalculation when reviewing budget figures and had substantially reduced the county’s reserve funds to offset a significant shortfall. In an interview May 20, Ellison traced the beginnings of the problem to last year’s budget cycle, when the committee voted to dip into two reserve accounts that added up to just under \$520,000 in order to plug holes in the budget. This year, she said, the county appeared to be in better financial shape, so the committee voted to liquidate with the hope that the county could use American Rescue Plan Act funds to boost general fund contingency. But as she was reviewing the numbers in her proposed 2022-23 budget, Ellison said, she realized she had miscalculated. She said she thought the accounting error might have been for ARPA funds, but she was not entirely sure because she did not save the calculator tape.

Forecast for Pendleton Area

