

BUDGET from A1

the proposed budget:

- “Protect our ability to provide the essential services — police, water, sewer, street operations and the support functions that make sure those services can be provided.
- “Participate in jump-starting our local economy by assisting our local businesses in restarting, having projects that will bring jobs and activity to the community and supporting projects funded with grants and loans.
- “Be conservative in our estimates — not too drastic — not too optimistic. Leave some room for potential adjustments during the year.”

Under the proposed budget, the city’s permanent rate would continue at \$7.2087 per \$1,000 of assessed value, which is estimated to generate slightly more than \$5 million of collectable tax revenue.

A 2-percent taxable value increase has been factored into the budget.

The 2021-22 budget also proposes to restore nearly all city positions which were laid-off, with some changes.

Talks with the Lane Council of Governments

has resulted in an agreement to move its Senior and Disability Services into the Cottage Grove Community Center when it re-opens, possibly this fall.

The Cottage Grove Genealogical Society will be moving to a remodeled space within the center and South Valley Athletics is taking the old Chamber of Commerce office.

The proposed budget is including \$15,000 to enter into a partnership with South Valley Athletics to expand recreation programs throughout the community, including youth summer day camp activities at the library and multi-generational activities to involve seniors.

Plans are also in the works to move South Lane County Fire and Rescue dispatch back to Cottage Grove by creating positions for four new communication specialists and the designation of a communications specialist lead position within the police department.

It is hoped the change will dramatically reduce response times and improve safety.

As previously reported on in *The Sentinel*, sewer rates are set to rise by an average of about \$6.45 on July 1.

The move to raise rates was voted on unanimously by the Cottage Grove City Council on April 12, based on a five-year financial plan presented on Feb. 22 from the city’s consulting firm FCS Group.

While FCS Group reported that customer growth alone would be sufficient to provide for rising operating expenses in both water and stormwater, capital plans and operating expenses for sewer caused the need for the rate increases.

The report recommended three years of 12 percent rate increases.

During the first day of the budget committee meeting on May 6, Councilor Mike Fleck asked city staff to explain the steep increase in personnel costs which saw a jump from \$634,568 in the 2018-19 fiscal year to \$999,365 in this proposed budget for 2021-22.

Fleck worried that this increase is unsustainable and would be passed on to the ratepayer.

Staff pointed out that these numbers had already been factored into the FCS Group five-year plan and that it would actually save money in the long run as infrastructure projects will be done in-house rather than through a third party.

“Caution should be taken when comparing actual expenditure numbers to proposed budget numbers,” stated a memo to the committee on Tuesday.

Succession planning is also a significant factor in planning the budget as several personnel will be retiring.

Meyers summed up the proposed budget as way to segue easily into a post-pandemic world should restrictions ease.

“The 2021-22 proposed budget lets us hit the reset button and be ready to restart programs and activities,” he wrote. “We don’t quite know when that restart will be, but this proposed budget gets us ready to move forward quickly and recover from the pandemic even better prepared.”

The city council may vote to adopt the proposed budget as early as May 24, when its next meeting is scheduled at 7 p.m.

Due to continuing COVID-related restrictions, the public is encouraged to attend meetings virtually by visiting the city’s website, accessing the relevant agenda and using the corresponding GoToMeetings link on the agenda page.

Administrative Aide at LCOG (Spanish bilingual preferred)

Lane Council of Governments (LCOG) seeks an Administrative Aide for its Senior & Disability Services (S&DS) Division. Provides administrative support to various programs. Greets and assists the public, staff, and others by phone or in person, providing information of a general nature as authorized. Spanish bilingual preferred. Full time, with full benefits package. This position is expected to start on June 28, 2021. Full job description and required application are available online at www.lcog.org or by calling LCOG at (541) 682-4283. DEADLINE: May 18, 2021 at 4 p.m. EOE/AA

Case Manager at LCOG

Lane Council of Governments (LCOG) seeks a Case Manager for the Senior & Disability Services (S&DS) Division. This position manages a caseload comprised of adults with disabilities 18-64 years of age and/or senior citizens. The caseload includes clients newly admitted to service, as well as clients who have been receiving services from S&DS for a period of time (i.e., on-going clients). Full time, with full benefits package. This position is expected to start on June 28, 2021. Full job description and required application are available online at www.lcog.org or by calling LCOG at (541) 682-4283. DEADLINE: May 18, 2021 at 4 p.m. EOE/AA

Contracts Manager at LCOG

Lane Council of Governments (LCOG) seeks a Contracts Manager for its Senior & Disability Services (S&DS) Division. This position will support and develop Older Americans Act (OAA) programs, Oregon Project Independence (OPI), and other Senior & Disability Services community programs. This includes development and monitoring of related contract agreements and requests for proposals, new program and service implementation, and supervision of program staff as assigned. Full time, with full benefits package. This position is expected to start on June 28, 2021. Full job description and required application are available online at www.lcog.org or by calling LCOG at (541) 682-4283. DEADLINE: May 18, 2021 at 4 p.m. EOE/AA

DIRECTOR from A1

telehealth, which caused a financial hit as they were providing services they couldn’t bill for.

“So, like any nonprofit, you know, money was kind of tight there,” Zepeda said.

Despite the hardship, SLMH continued to serve.

“I think there is a big misnomer going around Cottage Grove that we are completely closed to in-person services,” said Zepeda. “Throughout the pandemic we have and will continue to see clients in-person based on the discretion of their therapist.”

SLMH’s ACT (Assertive Community Treatment) Program has remained a constant service throughout the restrictions. The ACT team helps people with severe and persistence mental illness to implement individualized plans.

“We just finished our ACT fidelity review and we were the only ACT program in the state that has been seeing their clients in-person throughout the pandemic,” Zepeda said, adding, “Our residential home has been staffed with in-person providers also throughout the pandemic. Our nurse practitioners have also been providing the majority of their prescribing services in-person.”

Though doors are currently closed to the public, appointments can be made to come into the buildings.

With a deep rural background, Zepeda is also aiming to refine the non-

profit’s focus for an area like Cottage Grove.

“One of my values is really understanding the culture of poverty and making sure that everybody here is getting training on the culture of poverty,” he explained.

The United State Census Bureau estimated Cottage Grove’s poverty rate to be nearly 20 percent in 2019. For a family of four, that meant living on less than \$25,750 for the year.

Rural areas also have higher rates of trauma victims and substance abuse, said Zepeda. These troubles can be multiplied when public transportation is sparse.

“I really want to strive to meet people and serve them where we can,” he said. “We do send clinicians to foster homes, retirement homes, nursing homes, just depending on what the client needs. We really want to break down that transportation barrier.”

Since taking the helm of

the organization, Zepeda hopes to put SLMH’s full menu of services to use and expand others.

“So we have a full range of services that you can get here in Cottage Grove,” he said. “We’re kind of a one-stop shop. Whether you’re prescribing here, or you can go to a group, you can go to see a therapist one-on-one and you can get case management. ... I think that’s something that’s really special to our agency that we can provide these wrap-around services to really have a lot better mental health outcomes.”

As a bilingual leader of the organization, Zepeda is also well-positioned to communicate to a wider client base.

The agency recently started its ALAS Program, which provides services to the Spanish-speaking community

“We’re really trying to provide more services in Spanish in the schools,” he said.

SLMH is also connected with the upcoming Community Health Center, which is slated to begin construction this year.

In a recent move, the nonprofit announced its move to make use of solar energy with a grant from Pacific Power’s Blue Sky program. With a solar array now installed, SLMH hopes to save on energy costs and dedicate more of its budget to offering mental health care services as the community slowly emerges from the pandemic.

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- Mr. K’s Lock & Key
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