

Polk County
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IMPORTANT QUESTIONS REGARDING THE COUNTY PUBLIC SAFETY LEVY

Compiled by Jolene Guzman / The Itemizer-Observer

POLK COUNTY — The Polk County Board of Commissioners on Jan. 28 approved submitting a five-year public safety tax levy to voters for the May 19 vote-by-mail election.

This levy is the second attempt the county has made at getting voter approval for more tax revenue to support its public safety departments, including the Polk County Sheriff's Office, district attorney's office, community corrections and the juvenile department. The first levy, for four years and 60 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value on properties, failed by a 58 percent-to-42 percent margin in November 2013.

1 What is the duration and amount of the levy? How much revenue would it generate? How much would the levy cost?
Five years at 45 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value on properties. If approved, the levy would bring in approximately \$2.392 million in 2015, \$2.481 million in 2016, \$2.568 million in 2017, \$2.652 million in 2018, and \$2.731 million in 2019. For a property assessed at \$150,000, that would amount to \$67.50 per year.

2 Where would the money go?
If approved, the levy would restore 22 full-time equivalent positions in the Polk County Sheriff's Office and Polk County District Attorney's Office. Of those, 12 would go to the sheriff's office patrol division and five would go to the jail. The district attorney's office would receive three additional prosecutors and two support staff positions. Funding also would pay for two more juvenile detention beds and staff for community service crews.

3 Why is the levy needed?
Since April 2014, the sheriff's office has reduced patrol hours to only 10 hours per day, meaning that more than 1,600 calls for service have gone unanswered at the time they come in. The district attorney's office, with only four prosecutors, is the smallest among similar-sized counties in the state. It is struggling to keep up with the number of cases forwarded from local law enforcement agencies, including all Polk County city police departments, the sheriff's office and Oregon State Police.

4 Where does funding for public safety in Polk County come from?
The vast majority of funding for the district attorney, sheriff's office and juvenile department comes from the county's general fund, which is to say property taxes. Currently, the county allocates approximately two-thirds of its \$16 million general fund to those three departments.

5 What is the county's permanent tax rate?
\$1.71 per \$1,000 of assessed value. That is the amount going to the general fund. Polk County Administrator Greg Hansen said the tax rate was set when the county was receiving healthy amounts from federal timber payments (\$2.3 million in 2008, for example) and was adequate at the time. Now those payments have expired with little hope of restoration, at least not to historical levels. The county's road bond, currently at about 54 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value, is not part of that figure. The road bond expires in 2016.

See QUESTIONS, Page 17A

Timing important in decision

Commissioners convinced to put levy issue before voters ASAP

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — On an early July 2014 night, Lisa Mitchell dialed 9-1-1 only to learn no Polk County Sheriff's deputies were available to come to her aid.

Mitchell, a Perrydale School Board member and Amity Fire Department member, along with her daughter and a family friend, were the victims of a horrifying domestic violence incident that night.

"If any piece of the series of events that transpired that night were altered, I may not be here," she said during the Jan. 28 public hearing regarding Polk County's public safety levy.



No one was seriously injured, but the incident caused a fire that destroyed Mitchell's home. She believes if a deputy had been available to respond when she first called for help, that could have been prevented. She said she fears there will only be more victims if less-than-24-hour patrol coverage continues.

"Consider the consequences ... remember the quote: 'There is no one we can send,' and imagine your loved one on the other end of that line," she said. She urged Polk County commissioners to act as soon as possible. "What more information can we learn about this very critical situation?" she asked.

It was testimony like Mitchell's and other similar stories told over the course of nine public hearings that convinced Commissioner Jennifer Wheeler that the county needed to put a five-year, 45 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value tax levy for public safety on the ballot as soon as possible.

"I don't know how you look at a woman like Lisa and say, 'Sorry, we are going to have to put this on hold,'" Wheeler said. "That's not acceptable."

Commissioners Mike Ainsworth and Craig Pope were also moved by stories they heard, adding their votes to Wheeler's to place the levy on the May 19 ballot. See DECISION, Page 17A

IN YOUR TOWN

DALLAS NEWS

Contrary to popular belief, libraries aren't just for older people. In fact, the Dallas Public Library has a seven-member Teen Advisory Board (TAB) dedicated solely to making the library a fun place for teenagers to be. "I heard other libraries have success with it, and I wanted to try to see if that would work for Dallas," said Betty Simpson, the librarian in charge of children's and teen activities at the library. With the help of TAB, the library has created an expanded "young adult" section and is revamping its teen-centric activities.

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FALLS CITY NEWS

The rehabilitation project on Falls City's beloved staircase between Third and Prospect streets is steaming along, with the help of a large group of volunteers. Falls City Mayor Terry Ungricht said more than 20 volunteers have helped pour concrete on nine stairs that were beyond repair and install new handrails, a process which is nearing completion. When the weather allows, the stairs will be sealed to fill cracks, smooth the surface and protect the staircase. Painting the stairs — with a waterfall theme — and the installation of three benches on landings along the staircase will complete the project.

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INDEPENDENCE NEWS

Hannah Boyack leaves her heart on the stage in Central High School's performance of "Oklahoma!" which opens Thursday night. Boyack's character, Laurey Williams, is joined by a high-energy cast of 50, all singing, dancing — and occasionally fighting — in the 1906 Oklahoma Territory. The result of so many doing so much onstage at the same time is an emotion-packed experience for the audience member, with laughs, gasps, surprises and maybe even some tears. Performers also go through a ream of emotions during the production.

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MONMOUTH NEWS

Nearly half of Monmouth's streetlights are brighter and clearer — and using 65 percent less energy than their predecessors did before. A number of the city's old high-pressure sodium (HPS) bulbs have been replaced with new light-emitting diodes (LED), which require less energy to put off the same amount of light. Chuck Thurman, Monmouth Power & Light superintendent, said the projected energy costs for the city to run the streetlights will be \$32,000 a year, a noticeable drop from \$77,000 a year using the old style of lights.

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POLK COUNTY NEWS

Graduation rates in Polk County schools, and statewide, are up for the most part for 2013-14, but a change in how the state calculates the rates is partially responsible for the uptick. Dallas' graduation rate is up to 66 percent, from 52 percent last year, but that rate, six points lower than the state average, is technically down from 2012-13. This year, the Oregon Department of Education included students who have fulfilled graduation requirements but have deferred receiving diplomas so they could earn college credit in fifth-year programs, such as Dallas' Extended Campus.

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THE NEXT 7 DAYS PLANNING FOR YOUR WEEK

<p>wed</p> <p>It's the final home meet of the year as the Dallas wrestling team looks to cap a perfect league season when it hosts Silverton. 6 p.m. \$5.</p> <p>Cloudy; a shower? Hi: 53 Lo: 45</p>	<p>thu</p> <p>It's opening night as the Central High drama department stages "Oklahoma!" in the CHS performing arts auditorium. 6:30 p.m. \$5-\$8.</p> <p>Rain, Breezy Hi: 54 Lo: 50</p>	<p>fri</p> <p>The April Verch Band brings its high-energy show to Western Oregon University's Smith Music Hall. 7:30 p.m. \$11-\$28.</p> <p>Rain Hi: 53 Lo: 48</p>	<p>sat</p> <p>Polk Soil & Water Conservation District is conducting its annual Native Plant Sale at the fairgrounds in Rickreall. 9 a.m. Free.</p> <p>Rain Hi: 53 Lo: 46</p>	<p>sun</p> <p>Buell Grange northwest of Dallas is hosting its monthly Second Sunday Community Breakfast fundraiser. 8-11 a.m. \$6.</p> <p>Rain Hi: 55 Lo: 47</p>	<p>mon</p> <p>The Willamette Valley New Horizon's Orchestra has a recital planned at Faith Lutheran Church in Monmouth. 7 p.m. Free.</p> <p>Showers Hi: 52 Lo: 44</p>	<p>tue</p> <p>It's rivalry night as Central plays host to Dallas in a Mid-Willamette Conference boys basketball contest. 7 p.m. \$6.</p> <p>A Few Showers Hi: 54 Lo: 43</p>
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