

# Questions: Details about safety levy revealed

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**6 Why can't money be transferred from other departments, such as mental health and public works, to fund the public safety departments?**

When looking at the budget, it's easy to ask that question. The county's behavior health (formerly mental health) department budget sits at more than \$10 million and public works has \$6.8 million. However, those departments depend on dedicated funding — a.k.a. state and federal money — to provide services. No money from the county's general fund is given to those departments. Reallocating funding to public safety from those agencies wouldn't only shortchange services they provide, it would also be illegal.

**7 How would the levy specifically help the Polk County Sheriff's Office?**

It would restore 24-hour patrol coverage, revive the now-inactive Polk County Interagency Narcotics Team (POINT), provide

for better courtroom security, and ease the amount of overtime being used at the Polk County Jail, sitting at \$79,000 as of the end of December. Restoring 24-hour coverage would mean deputies would be available to back up city police and local fire departments on calls at all times.

**8 How would the levy specifically help the Polk County District Attorney's Office?**

District Attorney Aaron Felton has said the impact would be "transformational." The office would once again be able to put more focus on areas of prosecution it can't now. That would include assigning prosecutors to certain types of cases, including juvenile, drug offenses, elder abuse and financial crime.

**9 How would the levy specifically help community corrections and the juvenile departments?**

The levy would pay for two more juvenile detention beds, bringing the total to six. Currently, the county often has to rent additional space for juvenile detainees, especially those facing

Measure 11 charges, which include serious crimes committed against another person, such as murder, assault, rape and kidnapping. Rental rates cost \$162 per day. Resources also would be available to provide part-time managers for more weekend community service crews.

**10 What happens if the levy fails again?**

"My hope is we don't have further reductions," Hansen said of the 2015-16 budget. It's too early in budget planning to have a good idea of the revenue picture, though all indications show tax revenue will be up slightly, Hansen said. Other sources of revenue — such as the money the state provides community corrections to supervise offenders — is up in the air until the legislature approves the 2015-17 budget. Hansen said it could be lower because funding is based on the number of arrests, and with reduced patrol hours, arrests in Polk County have gone down. What is known on the expenditure side is a \$350,000 increase in PERS costs and an expected increase in employee insurance costs.

## Decision: May 19 election leaves little campaign time

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Now the clock is ticking for levy supporters.

With voters saying a resounding "no" to the first public safety levy the county put before voters in November 2013, the pressure is high to build a strong — and successful — campaign.

"I just am concerned that it's a pretty aggressive campaign and it's going to have to be aggressive in order to pass it," Sheriff Bob Wolfe said. "Without a lot of community involvement, I think the passage of it is a 50-50 chance."

Polk County District Attorney Aaron Felton said the public hearings have provided a foundation, but said, "We are going to have to work really, really hard and really fast to continue to get the word out."

Felton and Wolfe are not alone in that concern. Mayors of the five Polk County cities, including Salem, wrote of their support for a

lengthier campaign early in the process. However, both Dallas Mayor Brian Dalton and Salem Mayor Anna Peterson pledged support for the levy at recent public hearings.

"Dallas is a small town and rumors have a way of getting around, such as the rumor that I do not support the levy," Dalton said on Jan. 28. "This is manifestly untrue. My support is unconditional. It does not depend on when you choose to put it on the ballot; it does not depend on the tax rate."

Dalton called the levy "good public policy in difficult circumstances" and his only reservation about timing was that he believed cooperation between the county and cities is needed to pass the levy. A May election

puts that on a short timeline.

Wheeler thanked Dalton for his support and apologized for what she said was miscommunication that may have led to the rumor.

Dallas resident Rod Buchanan announced Jan. 28 that a political action committee has already been formed to support the levy.

"The three commissioners, they need to step up on this levy," Buchanan said. "They are responsible, but we are also responsible. They can work really hard, but if we don't do our job, it isn't going to happen."

Wolfe said it was reassuring that a PAC had formed.

"That is a step in the right direction," he said. "That is an indication that the community is already getting behind this."

**Sudoku Solution**

8	6	5	7	1	2	4	9	3
7	2	4	6	3	9	5	1	8
3	9	1	8	4	5	2	7	6
6	1	3	5	9	8	7	2	4
2	5	8	4	6	7	9	3	1
9	4	7	1	2	3	6	8	5
4	8	6	9	7	1	3	5	2
1	3	9	2	5	6	8	4	7
5	7	2	3	8	4	1	6	9

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