

Polk County Itemizer-Observer

Volume 141, Issue 15 www.Polkio.com April 13, 2016 75¢

School district faces million dollar loss

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — Budgeting just got trickier for Dallas School District.

A pattern of declining enrollment and how the state reconciles projected

enrollment with the actual number of students who attended has the district losing money, to the tune of \$1 million in this fiscal year, which ends June 30.

That significantly impacts the 2016-17 budget plan the district is working on now,

but shouldn't affect this school year.

On Monday, Business Manager Tami Montague updated members of the Dallas School Board on how the financial picture had changed for the district.

"Obviously we had hoped

to go into next fiscal year on a more stable financial position with a higher ending fund balance," Montague said.

She noted that the district like, all government entities in the state, would likely be hit with Oregon Public Em-

ployee Retirement System rate increase in 2017-18.

Montague said predictions for the next two years have enrollment continuing to fall, with an estimated loss of 138 students in 2016-17 and 63 students in 2017-18.

See LOSS, Page 13A

IN YOUR TOWN

DALLAS

Dallas resident David Wales collects video game consoles, now on display at Dallas Public Library.

»Page 3A

New VSO may come to Polk County

County budget committee approves money for local veterans support officer

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — For decades, veterans in Polk County who needed help with their benefits claim had to go into Salem, where the closest Veterans Affairs office is located.

In early 2017, that may change.

Last week, the Polk County Budget Committee approved \$40,000 to hire a county veterans' service officer and staff a local office. The state will also pitch in to open an office.



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer file

Starting in January, vets in Polk County will have a local veterans service officer to help them with their claims.

overdue, but it was time to do that," Hansen said.

While the budget is only tentatively approved at this point, the new program has the support of county officials.

Commissioner Jennifer Wheeler said a group of veterans and vet advocates brought the issue to the Polk County Board of Commissioners about three months ago.

They said a local office —

and more importantly, a local service officer — is greatly needed, she said.

"A lot of the veterans who might have transportation issues, might not know the services are available, or for whatever reason, are reluctant or unable to get to the state office," Wheeler said.

A main component of a local program is the ability for a service officer to go to the veterans by setting up events or "satellite" loca-

tions throughout the county. Hansen said the state office doesn't have the capability to do much of that now.

"The state's really trying to do the state work and not the county work for Marion and Polk," Hansen said. "They realized they can't do the job that a county employee can who lives here and goes out into the community. You have to go to them if you want

the service."

Wayne Crowder, a veteran and advocate for veterans, said that vets living in Polk County have wondered why Polk didn't have its own officer.

He believes the program will greatly improve services to vets in the area, and it didn't take much to convince the budget committee when he spoke before the group on April 5.

See VETERANS, Page 13A

FALLS CITY

Falls City looks to make room in schools with the help of a bond.

»Page 2A

INDEPENDENCE

Central High School students make build-your-own covered wagons with fourth-graders from Independence Elementary School.

»Page 14A

MONMOUTH

Monmouth City Council looks to finish Senior Center expansion.

»Page 3A

SPORTS

Western Oregon sophomore Kaleb Dobson hurdles over doubts.

»Page 11A

Two arrested after pursuit

Itemizer-Observer staff report

DALLAS — Officers arrested two Dallas men after a pursuit in which the suspects fled in a stolen vehicle Sunday.

At about 7:41 p.m., a Dallas officer found a Honda that had been reported stolen in north Dallas. The officer attempted to stop the vehicle, but the driver refused. A Polk County sergeant joined the chase with Dallas officers.

In the 20000 block of Highway 22, the Honda's engine was disabled and the driver drove off the highway. Both driver, Jeffrey Rodgers, 22, and passenger, Morgan Swyers, 26, tried to flee on foot, but officers caught them.

Swyers was charged with unauthorized use of a motor vehicle, second-degree theft, and second-degree criminal mischief. He also had a warrant for his arrest out of Linn County.

Rodgers was charged with unlawful possession of methamphetamine, attempting to elude in a vehicle, possession of a stolen vehicle, unauthorized use of a vehicle, attempting to elude on foot, reckless driving, reckless endangering and driving while suspended.

Both were taken to Polk County Jail.

Facilities bond would help repair failing buildings

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — Fair Manager Tina Andersen often jokes that parts of the buildings out at the Polk County Fairgrounds are "held together with paint."

She's kidding — mostly.

There are some glaring maintenance issues at the fairgrounds and at the county's complex on Main Street in Dallas, a combination of the county's historic courthouse and newer addition.

"There are needs, and I see it as the strongest remaining need in the county," said County Administrator Greg Hansen.

The Polk County Jail is still fairly new and the Academy Building recently had a major remodel, so those buildings should be in good shape, he said.

"This building and the historic building are in much greater need of a facelift and then some," Hansen said of the courthouse complex during Thursday's final budget hearing. "Then we have the fairgrounds. You are all aware of the conditions of the buildings out there."



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Buildings at the Polk County Fairgrounds need heavy maintenance.

The county's \$20 million road bond will expire in the 2016-17 fiscal year, so the county is considering asking voters pass a bond for about half the cost to address some of those infrastructure needs. Currently, taxpayers are paying about 52 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value on properties for the road bond.

Hansen said, if sent to the voters, the new bond would be for about half as much — between \$9 million and \$10 million. During a discussion Thursday, budget committee members weighed using the money to build a new facility or maintain existing buildings.

The driver for the conversation was the designation of the Polk County Fairgrounds as an emergency "evacuation center."

"I guess I have a concern that if you've got an emergency evacuation center and the big one hits, you don't have any buildings at the fairgrounds for an evacuation center," said Norbert Hartmann, budget committee chairman.

He said if the county is going to say it's an evacuation center, it should live up to the name and suggested adding a small building on the complex that could withstand a catastrophic earthquake.

"If that truly is the place we can go to besides the jail, we need to have a facility that can provide the support necessary to make that happen," Hartmann said.

The Polk County Fair Board is looking at a new building, but not just for

that purpose and not one that would use bond proceeds, Andersen said.

"We need a bigger building because we are booked to capacity," she said. "We are turning events away."

She said the fair board plans for a multiuse facility, but would rely on the Polk County Fair Foundation and grants to build it, not property taxes.

Maintenance for existing buildings at the fairgrounds — that is a different matter.

Andersen said the fairgrounds can't cover its expenses when building upkeep is factored in. The county will transfer \$75,000 to the fair for the most necessary projects in the next fiscal year, but that will just scratch the surface.

"You could sink \$1 million and not even blink out there; you could spend \$2 million and not even blink," Hansen said. "The need is there."

Hansen said as to the designation of the fairgrounds as an "alternate evacuation site," it has the space for emergency responders to set up, but no buildings that would survive a major earthquake.

"We don't have anything out there," he said. "Maybe we quit saying that."

THE NEXT 7 DAYS PLANNING FOR YOUR WEEK

<p>wed</p> <p>Monmouth Senior Center will host a music jam, open to musicians and music lovers of all ages. 6:30 p.m. Free.</p> <p>Mostly cloudy Hi: 60 Lo: 40</p>	<p>thu</p> <p>A new program provides hotdogs, hoops and homework at the Dallas LDS church each Thursday. 5-8 p.m. Free.</p> <p>Showers Hi: 56 Lo: 41</p>	<p>fri</p> <p>Gem and Mineral Show opens today at the Polk County Fairgrounds & Event Center and includes a kids treasure hunt. 9 a.m.-5 p.m. \$2.</p> <p>Mostly cloudy Hi: 61 Lo: 41</p>	<p>sat</p> <p>Pick up a free book at Monmouth Montessori School. Additional books may be purchased with a donation. 10 a.m.-noon. Free.</p> <p>Partly cloudy Hi: 70 Lo: 44</p>	<p>sun</p> <p>Hang out with RC pilots and learn more about the hobby at the Wingdinger's monthly meeting. 1-3 p.m. Free.</p> <p>Partly cloudy Hi: 75 Lo: 49</p>	<p>mon</p> <p>OK those of you who like to wait to the last minute, you made it. State and federal income tax returns are due today.</p> <p>Partly cloudy Hi: 77 Lo: 46</p>	<p>tue</p> <p>Dallas Mat Club and LaCreole Middle School wrestling are selling flower baskets to be delivered on time for Mother's Day.</p> <p>Mostly sunny Hi: 70 Lo: 46</p>
---	---	--	---	--	---	--

0 94922 61652 4