

Committee agrees to raises for county officials

County administrator say increases needed to bring Polk up to par with salaries in other counties

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — The committee that evaluates the salaries of Polk County's elected officials recommended raises for all of them, and providing a supplement to the district attorney's position for the first time in nearly 30 years.

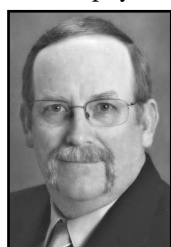
The Compensation Committee consists of the three non-elected members of the county's budget committee. They review salaries every year. The group met on Jan. 18.

Current monthly salaries for the county's elected officials are: Commissioners — \$5,679, with \$500 expense allowance; Assessor — \$6,454, with \$350 expense allowance; Clerk — \$6,376, with \$150 expense allowance; Sheriff — \$7,650, with \$786 expense allowance; and Treasurer — \$1,000, with a \$5,850 stipend for tax collector and finance officer duties.

The district attorney's salary is paid by the state, and the county hasn't offered a supplement to its last five district attorneys, even though it is a longstanding practice in most other coun-

ties in the state, said County Administrator Greg Hansen.

"I have a long-standing argument that the state should pay the individual or that position appropriately. I don't believe they have or will," he said.



Pope



Wheeler



Ainsworth

Hansen's recommendation to the committee was to begin with a \$750 monthly supplement to the DA. He said his goal is to increase it over time.

Additionally, Hansen's memo outlined increases for other officials: Commissioners — 6 percent to \$6,520; Assessor — 3 percent to \$6,998; Clerk — 3 percent to \$6,717; Sheriff — 2 percent to \$8,589 and Treasurer — a \$150 increase to the stipend to bring the total to \$7,000.

Those salaries still are less than those of each officer's counterparts in Benton, Lincoln, Linn, Tillamook and Yamhill counties. The sheriff's salary is the closest to the five-county average at 1.53 percent behind, while the commissioners would be the furthest behind at 7.80 percent.

"I try to recommend what I feel is right and what is the best business practice to get the salaries in a competitive area of compensation," Hansen said.

The salaries are proposed for the 2017-18 fiscal year.

Committee member Blair Wasson asked if the county is seeing any big swings in revenue.

"We're seeing property taxes growing back at pre-2008 rates. We're probably a little over 5 percent in total growth," Hansen said. "You are going to get most of that 3 percent natural growth, and new growth is in the range of 2 percent or 2.5 percent."

Hansen said the budget could be squeezed a little if

Proposed increases

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- Treasurer — \$1,000, with \$5,850 stipend for tax collector and finance officer duties.

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- Treasurer — a \$150 increase to stipend to bring the total to \$7,000.

He also suggested adding a \$750 monthly stipend to the district attorney.

insurance coverage costs make a big jump, combined with an approximately \$600,000 increase in Oregon Public Employees Retirement System costs.

"I would say we are on solid financial ground, as solid as we have been in the last 10 years," Hansen said.

The monthly cost of the increases as proposed is \$2,461.

"This isn't going to affect us fiscally," Hansen said.

Committee members had no problem with breaking with tradition on offering

the district attorney a supplement.

"I've always thought Greg's theory made a lot of sense. It's the state's responsibility, let the state do it," said committee member Vern Wells. "I've also never thought that Polk County would make the difference.

If every other county pays, Polk County is not going to change the state's mind."

Increases for assessor, clerk, treasurer and sheriff — which, by statute, must be the highest paid position in the office —

were deemed reasonable by the committee. A 6 percent raise for the Polk County Board for Commissioners was viewed as steep.

Hansen said he will continue to propose increases for the commissioners until they catch their peers.

That doesn't mean the committee — or the board, which has refused pay raises in the past — will accept the proposal.

"If we do 6 percent on the commissioners, that combined with last year's 4 percent is 10 percent in two years," Wasson said.

He suggested the increase be cut to 3 percent.

Wells said he took issue with the idea that it's acceptable to pay elected officials less than appointed officials to serve as CEOs of their organizations.

Nevertheless, he voted to approve Hansen's proposal with the reduced percentage increase for the commissioners.

The cost per month for approved increases is \$1,950.

The budget committee and the board of commissioners will review and vote on the salaries during the budget process this spring.

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