

# Courthouse security to get upgrade

By Samantha O'Conner  
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Baker County commissioners on Wednesday approved a \$56,000 upgrade to the security system at the Baker County Courthouse.

The money is from the state court system, not county tax dollars, said Bill Harvey, Commission chairman.

Commissioners also designated Avigilon as the sole source provider for the equipment.

The reason, said Dan McQuisten, the county's facilities director, is that the current mainframe computer server and operating system are proprietary equipment made by Avigilon, and the goal is to ensure that the upgraded equipment, including new

cameras, will integrate with the current system.

"It's just acknowledging the fact that we're not going out to bid from all possible providers of that type of technology because we want to continue utilizing what we already have," McQuisten said.

The actual contract is with Blue Horizon of Hillsboro, an authorized retailer of Avigilon products.

Among the upgrades are replacing six exterior cameras, some of which will have a 360-degree view.

Another 16 cameras will be installed inside the Courthouse, some replacing existing cameras and some in new locations.

"In the past we've had just a system that was put in years ago and we have had some blind spots in

areas," Harvey said. "And this helps us to not only see something going on at the moment but it also records it for when we possibly need it for evidence in a case if somebody does something wrong, we have it recorded."

## COVID-19 issues

Commissioner Mark Bennett said county officials have been working to ensure that personal protective equipment the county has received through the federal CARES Act is delivered where it's needed.

"We've supported that with staff from the assessors office and delivering it out to the rural communities and sorting it and getting shipments in," Bennett said.

He also said county officials are working with the Baker County Fair Board to ensure the Fair, in some capacity, happens this August.

"It'll look totally different, probably, not knowing what phase two is," Bennett said, referring to the second phase of the state's reopening plan.

Baker County started the first phase on May 15 and could potentially move into the second phase by early June.

"It will look considerably different than the normal Baker County Fair but it will be a fair so that the kids will have something for the summer after they've invested all this work in getting their livestock and other exhibits ready," Bennett said.

# State expecting \$3 billion shortfall

By Peter Wong  
Oregon Capital Bureau

Gov. Kate Brown says federal aid must go hand in hand with spending cuts to offset almost \$3 billion that state tax collections and other sources will be short.

Brown made her statement Wednesday after state economists told lawmakers that the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented economic downturn from shutdowns in business activity and public life.

Oregon's unemployment rate jumped from a modern low of 3.5% in March to a modern high of 14.2% in April. Oregon's state general fund budget draws more than 90% of its money from personal and corporate income taxes. The combined general fund and lottery budget for the

2019-21 cycle is about \$23.7 billion, and virtually all of the potential spending cuts of \$2.7 billion will fall within the second year starting July 1.

"The steepness of this decline is unprecedented," State Economist Mark McMullen said during a video conference of the House and Senate revenue committees.

While he and Senior Economist Josh Lehner said they expected a quick economic recovery when business activity resumes — as early as the second half of 2020, and an "all clear" by mid-2021 — "it takes a full year or more before pain is realized."

They also projected that state coffers will get less than originally forecast in the following two budget cycles.

## SCHOOLS

Continued from Page 1A

"I personally hope — and quite frankly, pray — we are in in-person school," Witty told the budget board during its first meeting of the season via Zoom video session. Witty added that the face-to-face relationships built between students and staff are a vital element of education.

Witty said Gov. Kate Brown has asked all state agencies to reduce their budgets by 8.5% per year for the biennium, which amounts to 17% for the coming year since the current fiscal year ends June 30.

With Wednesday's release of the state's latest revenue forecast, the governor issued a statement recognizing that the needs of Oregonians during the coronavirus pandemic "far outstrip" state resources.

"We will need to tighten our belts," she said. "I am working with legislative leaders to preserve critical state services, find efficiencies, and prepare for potential budget cuts."

In a telephone interview while walking to lunch in the rain Wednesday, Witty said the revenue forecast was not as bad as he'd

expected based on earlier conversations. As a result, he doesn't think agencies will be forced to make the full 17% in cuts.

He said school districts expect to be notified by the state Department of Education in early June about the strategy for reopening schools.

Summer school guidelines already have been received and Baker's Summer Academy program should serve as a good practice for reopening in the fall.

Witty said he hopes the governor will allow schools to reopen in a way that best suits the coronavirus situation in their own communities.

Just as counties have been allowed to begin to reopen based on the number of COVID-19 cases and their ability to respond to them, he hopes the same will be true of the schools.

"The groups I work with certainly would like to see it more localized if we have fewer cases," he said.

As of Wednesday, Baker County has had one confirmed case.

Although the District will be prepared for in-person school at the highest level in the fall, it also will be preparing for distance learning

and everything in between, Witty said.

He told the budget board members Tuesday night that he expects education to fare well when the Legislature meets to consider cuts because of the strong lobbying efforts through the Oregon School Boards Association, the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators, the Oregon Education Association and parenting organizations.

With that hope moving forward, Witty said the District has built its proposed 2020-21 budget based on the \$9 billion landmark state school funding measure approved by the Legislature for the 2019-2021 biennium, "with obvious ways to step down."

Witty's optimism is fueled by several factors, he told the budget board members.

First, the Baker School District's financial position is better than many school districts because of the entrepreneurial projects it has undertaken over the past decade, including development of the Baker Charter Schools, Baker Technical Institute and aggressively seeking grants and outside contracts.

"In effect, the decision the board made a decade ago to alleviate any recession is coming to fruition," Witty said.

He acknowledged, however, that the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic are greater than any seen before in state history.

The increased funding for education and early learning is "most likely to be nullified by the COVID-19 recession" Witty's written budget message stated. However, the superintendent pointed to the Education Stability Fund and the Rainy Day Fund, which, he said, are both in better financial condition than ever before to help backfill funding losses.

Cost-saving measures already implemented by the District include a spending freeze, furloughing employees through the Employment Department's Work Share program, increasing Medicaid billing and a hiring slowdown.

Witty said the deputy superintendent of public instruction stated in a recent meeting that the accommodations schools are making to cope with the coronavirus might be

in place for two years, continuing through the 2021-22 school year.

The Baker School District's proposed 2020-21 budget totals \$68,073,037. That includes:

- General Fund — \$53,446,121
- Special Funds — \$8,823,503
- PERS Debt Fund — \$1,662,865
- Capital Project Fund — \$3,185,000
- Enterprise Fund — \$870,033
- Trust and Agency Funds — \$868,514

More information and a copy of the complete budget proposal is available online at [www.5j.org](http://www.5j.org) or by calling the District Office at 541-524-2260.

The budget committee includes the five School Board members — Chris Hawkins, chair; Katie Lamb, vice chair; Kevin Cassidy, Julie Huntington and Andrew Bryan. The committee's other members are community representatives Linda Cyr, who was elected budget committee chair Tuesday; Wes Price, who was elected vice chair; and members Rosemary Abell, Josey Gaslin and Mike Rudi.

The group's next Zoom video session will be at 5 p.m. May 26.

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