EOC

Continued from Page A1

Fund for the EOC in March with $23,564 budgeted for materials and services and $101,436 budgeted for personnel services.

The $23,564 corresponds with a procurement request Dobler submitted in court March 25 for supplies, including $18,000 for communications and information technology. Ellison said that account is currently underfunded by $9,815.

The documents Dobler presented in court list an additional $10,200 supply procurement request on March 13 for a total of $33,800, but that $10,000 figure was never actually budgeted.

Scott Myers

The personnel services account still has $15,195 remaining, Ellison said, but there are thousands of dollars in accounts payable and invoices that must still be paid.

Ellison said the additional funding would most likely be transferred from the General Fund Contingency, which would need to be allocated by the Grant County Court.

"I do not know at this time how much will be needed," she told the Eagle.

Sam Palmer

Court approval

When the county court approved Dobler's original procurement request, they added the direction that "any future purchases over $200 would need to be approved by the county court," according to the approved meeting minutes.

After the procurement request, however, no additional purchases were approved in a session of the Grant County Court, including the $35,000 federal reimbursement tracking software and up to $10,000 for a contract for grant-writing services to secure federal reimbursements.

Jim Hamsher

The EOC spent $14,800 on communications equipment. It bought at least 11 laptops and a printer costing $6,100 and six speaker phones for $900, plus $90 for two-day shipping.

The $91,791 total supply procurement cost presented in court by Dobler includes $54,789 for IT and software, $15,021 for general expenses and rent, $14,889 for communications, $3,022 for non-EOC expenses, $1,856 for decontamination, $1,169 for office supplies, $698 for gas and $343 for shipping.

For 12 full-time and part-time EOC employees, including some overtime and some employees who only work as needed, the EOC cost for 12 weeks of wages from March through May was $81,728, plus $13,000 in benefits and $10,500 for a safety officer for a total of $105,228 in payroll and fees.

County Judge Scott Myers and Commissioners Sam Palmer, the EOC public information officer, and Jim Hamsher, the court liaison to the EOC, did not respond to questions about the EOC budget or why purchases over $200 were not brought before the court.

In court, Hamsher said the plan was to submit the EOC's expenditures for reimbursement. He said up to 100% reimbursement was possible through Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act funding received by the state, compared to up to 75% reimbursement possible through FEMA.

The county submitted a proposal for reimbursement through the state of Oregon Coronavirus Relief Fund Thursday and is waiting to hear back, according to information posted on the county COVID-19 website, grantcountycovid.com.

Rule

Continued from Page A1

consultant for the AFRC based in John Day. "We have far fewer mills out here than we used to."

The 21-inch rule was developed as a means of slowing the loss of old-growth trees, which provide numerous benefits to forest health. Not only do they provide fish and wildlife habitat for species such as salmon, nesting birds and mammals, but they are also more resilient to insect outbreaks, disease and wildfire.

To develop the Eastside Screens, tree diameter was used as a surrogate for age. Measuring tree age was slower than measuring size, and guidelines to expedite the process were unavailable at the time, according to the Pacific Northwest Research Station's report.

Twenty-five years later, researchers are finding the rule does have apparent flaws. For example, it does not allow foresters to remove young trees of certain species that may be larger than 21 inches, but do not provide the same benefits and are more prone to burning in massive wildfires.

In its report, the Pacific Northwest Research Station described the 21-inch rule as a "blunt policy instrument" in response to widespread public support for conserving old-growth forests, but does not account for complex forest stands or provide flexibility to make site-specific management decisions.

"Tree diameter alone is an insufficient guide for restoration, and for managing landscapes for resilience to climate change and related stressors," the report states.

Researchers say amendments should take into account factors such as tree species, age, spatial patterns, soil, near- versus long-term threats to tree stands from drought, insects and pathogens.

Andy Geissler, federal timber program director for the AFRC, said amending the Eastside Screens will return management to professional foresters rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all rule, which would open more acres for treatment and increase federal timber supplies.

Since fire suppression became a widespread practice in the early 1900s, Geissler said different species of shade-tolerant trees, like grand fir and white fir, are taking over beneath the canopies of old-growth ponderosa pine and Douglas fir, competing for moisture and creating hazardous fuels for larger wildfires.

"The very trees (the Forest Service) was initially trying to save are dying from moisture stress," he said. "It's really all about the Forest Service getting to where they want to be in terms of resiliency and hazardous fuels reduction."

Session

Continued from Page A1

to work with the Chamber of Commerce in the future," the city's May 21 agenda states. "However, the responsibility for the disposition of John Day's TRT funds, including their budgeting and annual audits, will reside with the John Day City Council, the John Day Budget Committee, and city staff and/or city TRT committees as appropriate. This will ensure the funds are used appropriately, transparently and effectively to achieve their intended purpose."

Working together

Amid the argument over the best use of TRT funds during the work session, members from both organizations highlighted the importance of working together.

"I would like to step in a little bit before it gets completely fired up and we leave against each other," said Councilor Shannon Adair. "I guess the biggest concern I have is that we aren't working together. We need to work together."

Didgette McCracken, a board member from the chamber, said the two organizations have the same goals — an increase in visitors and increase revenue in the county.

"A lot of the things that we are talking about is how we would spend the money, and I know we all have specifics that we would like

Jerry Franklin

seen done or improved, and they all seem great, but I think before we get to that stage of pointing fingers on what needs spent, we need to think of an efficient way to make that happen," McCracken said. "... What can we overlap on or what things make sense for us both to invest in, and why can't we agree on that together? Those things can happen through strategy and planning..."

Councilor Elliot Sky said he also noticed the silo effect, where the city works alone and seems to butt heads with other organizations at times, but he hasn't seen a lot of reaching out to the city to coordinate with planning.

He said that a lack of coordination leads to a feeling that the city is working on an isolated path and is doing things others don't want, when he feels that the projects are designed for the benefits and interests of the city and county.

"Part of my frustration has always been ... how can we bolster the city's investment and recognize it's improving the county as a whole and get these different organizations — the county, the cities and the chamber of commerce — to unify along a vision so we can piggyback on ourselves," Sky said.

Nick Green

Councilor Paul Smith said county residents need the chamber, cities and the county court to work together.

"We're too small," he said. "We don't have the resources and the revenues, as Didgette said, to be siloed."

The aftermath

After the hour-and-a-half session, development continued.

"I personally appreciate what you guys are trying to accomplish," Franklin said at the end of the TRT discussion. "You're thinking outside of the box, and it's the first time in many years that I've been here that that's happened. And I hope you can connect those dots and make this work, and it's going to be good for the whole county."

In an interview on May 28, Green acknowledged the tension in the room during the work session. Green said anytime conversations on changing the status quo come up, there can be a little bit of discomfort, but the city is working to arrive at the right solution for the community.

"I know it probably felt like there was a lot of tension in the room," he said. "Change is disruptive. Tension is not a bad thing. Sometimes you need to have conflict in order to figure out what you really value and what's important and how you can move forward together. I want to make sure the chamber understands we respect them and the work they do."

Green said the chamber receives a bulk of its TRT funds from the city, and that's not going to change.

Green said the conversation is now about working together to accomplish a shared vision. He said both groups need to be on the same page in terms of expectations and how they are going to achieve them.

Bremner said she met with Green May 27, which helped relieve tension, as both organizations are looking towards the future. She said she hopes for improved communications between the groups.

She said the chamber is currently working to complete a logo, which presents a great opportunity to work with John Day and all the cities in the county.