



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

Kircher Korner's tenant Kathleen Evans said owner Bob Phillips began working on her neighbor's deck but has not completed the project.

John Day proposes tax or agreement with county for police

Green: City lacks funds to sustain department without cuts, new revenue

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

The future of the John Day Police Department remains uncertain as questions on funding persist.

The John Day City Council discussed on March 23 two possible routes the city could pursue for policing in John Day: entering a law enforcement services agreement with the Grant County Sheriff's Office or seeking a local levy to fund the department.



John Day Police Chief Mike Durr

City Manager Nick Green said, if the city wants to recruit a new chief after Chief Mike Durr retires this year, the city would need to request a five-year local option levy — between 10 and 15 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value — to fund the department.

Green said the levy is necessary because the city lacks the money to sustain the department unless they come up with another revenue source, or cuts are made to personnel.

Police department expenditures have grown in the past 20 years, far outpacing the sources of revenue funding the department, according to graphs presented by Green.

Green said future costs — an incoming collective bargaining agreement, aging vehicles in need of replacement over the next five years, hiring a new police chief and legislation in Oregon — all present cost increases in the next fiscal year, which concerns him.

"What we have seen over the past two decades (in expenditures) is pretty consistent price escalation that significantly outpaces our revenue," Green said. "The gap that we're trying to close from 20 years ago, which was just a little over \$100,000, today has grown to a little over \$400,000. All the while, we lost 300 residents."

If the city were to pursue a local tax, it would need to be approved by voters in John Day. Green said he spoke with Grant County Sheriff Todd McKinley to see what a law enforcement services agreement would look like. The city would be required to cover the costs of the staff members that would be repositioned, two full-time officers and a full-time sergeant, for the first year, he said, and the county would request the city pays for four full-time positions.

"I'll just relay what Todd told me, the county expects us to pay for four (full-time officers)," Green said.

No decision was made, but the council said it would be important to continue talking with members of the community to see how they feel about both options. They discussed holding a study session with McKinley and possibly the county commissioners.

"One or the other thing is going to happen, and it's going to happen this fall," Green said. "But I need to know by the end of next month if we're recruiting for a new chief or if we're going to pursue the transition option."

Durr was not present at the city council meeting for comments.

UN-SUBSIDIZED HOUSING

Kircher Korner's to lose HUD contract April 1, leaving Prairie City residents uncertain where to go

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

The owner of a government-subsidized eight-unit apartment building in Prairie City will lose his federal contract on April 1 due to "physical disrepair" of the property, and local tenants are uncertain where to go.

According to a March 12 letter tenant Kathleen Evans received from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development that she shared with the Eagle, the building's owner, Bob Phillips, "repeatedly" violated his contract with the agency.



Kathleen Evans

Phillips told the Eagle he only recently found out about the letter sent to Evans when he saw a post on social media. He said the state, which administers the HUD contract, had not contacted him in at least four months, and they are supposed to provide 90 or 120 days notice of a cancellation.

Phillips said he has a service that bills the state on his behalf and he received a response stating his request for April had been approved. He said he usually gets a deposit for the rent subsidies by the second day of the month.

Phillips said he plans to try to renew the contract, and he will work with the tenants and not immediately evict them if he is unable to renew the contract.

Rick Lombardi, a resolution specialist with HUD, said in an email that the violations were, for the most part, "due to physical disrepair of the property." The Eagle filed a public records request for the HUD inspection reports last week.



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

Prairie City resident Charles Williams, whose mother Cleo Larkin lives at Kircher Korner's, points out areas where he said there was black mold on his mother's back porch.

Lombardi said the agency would not force the tenants to move out of Kircher Korner's, but it will no longer pay Phillips the rent it had been paying.

"If they wish to be placed into improved housing in the area, the department assumes the cost of relocation and will help them find a new place to live," he said.

Nowhere to go

Evans said, however, she does not know where to go because housing is sparse in Grant County. She said, although the letter was created on March 12, she did not receive it until March 23, just days before the looming action.

"I'm shocked," she said. "If I had known this was coming, I would have been prepared. What am I supposed to do? What is everyone else supposed to do?"

She said she is worried about her neighbors, as many of them have physical disabilities. Evans told the Eagle she is also concerned about herself because she has four emotional support animals — two dogs and

two cats — and finding housing in the county would be next to impossible.

"It's already impossible," Evans said while holding back tears. "There's really no housing available in Grant County. And I don't want to leave Prairie (City). This is my home."

Evans said she does not have family in Grant County. Her son, she said, is in New York while her mother is in Southern California.

Another tenant, Cleo Larkin, 83 and on oxygen, said she intended on living out the rest of her life at Kircher Korner's when she moved there two years ago.

"This was supposed to be my home until I was gone," Larkin said.

Larkin, who has lived in Grant County her whole life, said her only other option for staying in the county would be to move across the street into Blue Mountain Care Center.

"I'll kill myself before I go," she said.

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Bill barring firearms from Oregon's state buildings passes Senate

Local governments would be allowed to ban guns in their own buildings

By Peter Wong
Oregon Capital Bureau

Firearms would be barred from state buildings, and local governments would have the option of banning them from their own buildings, under a bill that is halfway through the Oregon Legislature.

The Senate voted 16-7 on Thursday for Senate Bill 554. It goes to the House after a debate lasting more than three hours and reflecting the national arguments about gun regulation.

Majority Democrats defeated a Republican-proposed substitute that would have affirmed the constitutional right to bear arms and required a study of gun-free zones. They also rejected seven other Republican motions that would have delayed or killed the bill.



Eagle file photo

State Sen. Lynn Findley

The bill would bar about 300,000 holders of concealed-handgun licenses from bringing their firearms into state buildings, including the Capitol. Some places, such as state courts, already are off limits.

Cities, counties, schools and other local governments would have the

option under the bill to bar firearms from their buildings, although adjacent garages and parking lots are excluded. A ban also can apply to airport terminals; the federal Transportation Security Administration oversees boarding areas and the shipment of firearms in stored luggage.

Violations would be considered a Class C felony, maximum penalties for which are a \$125,000 fine and five years in prison, although unlikely to be levied on a first offense.

The bill also would raise initial fees for concealed-handgun licenses from \$50 to \$100, and renewals from \$50 to \$75.

The debate got so heated that Senate Security Committee member who apologized earlier for a comment about "crushing opponents" that referred to Oregon opponents in the NCAA basketball tournaments — said, "People are getting angry about this measure from all sides."

But it was clear that Democrats had

the votes to prevail, rejecting Republican motions to send the bill to various committees.

The Senate Judiciary Committee spent four hours Feb. 22 listening to testimony, much of it from gun-rights advocates opposed to the bill, and passed it on a 4-3 party-line vote a few days later.

What supporters said

The bill's chief sponsor and floor manager was Sen. Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, a long-time supporter of gun regulation.

Burdick said that under a state law dating back to 1969, possession of firearms in a public building is a felony unless that person has a concealed-handgun license.

But until 1989, when state law changed to require issuance of licenses to people who met specified standards, Burdick said sheriffs had

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