

# The Blue Mountain EAGLE

Grant County's newspaper since 1868

Wednesday, April 14, 2021

153rd Year • No. 15 • 16 Pages • \$1.50

MyEagleNews.com



## Budget whoas

Revenues are down, expenses are up as Grant County faces difficult funding decisions

By Steven Mitchell  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County is facing a looming budget crisis.

The initial 2021-2022 budget proposed by Grant County Treasurer Julie Ellison drains the county's reserve funds — about \$500,000 — and reduces cash on hand by about \$700,000 to balance a major budget shortfall from reduced federal funding and major projects, repairs and spending increases in nearly all of the county's funds.



Julie Ellison

Ellison noted in her budget proposal April 7 that the reserve funds were eliminated so she could submit a balanced budget to the Budget Committee, which will make the ultimate funding decisions before the July deadline.

"The only way to solve the perpetual shortfall will be to eliminate positions," she said.

Ellison said, if the county was to spend all of its reserves this year, it would not have any left to balance the budget again next year, so they'll have to budget accurately or make even more significant cuts next year.

### How bad is it?

Ellison noted in the budget message that in the last fiscal year, 2020-2021, the county had \$1.5 million cash on hand to start the year.

The county will begin fiscal year 2021-2022 on July 1 with \$727,997, according to the proposed budget.

At the start of fiscal year 2020-2021, Ellison said, the county had \$206,000 in its contingency fund. In the upcoming fiscal year 2020-2021, the fund is proposed to be at \$39,959.

### Revenues down

Expected revenues from the last budget cycle did not materialize, and expenses exceeded estimates, leading to the budget problems this year.

One large revenue source — Payment in Lieu of Taxes, which funds states to offset property tax losses in areas with high concentrations of federal public lands — brought Grant County upwards of \$706,000.

The only problem: The county budgeted for \$900,000.

Ellison said in the message she attributes part of the deficit to the county banking on \$200,000 more in revenue than they received.

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# GRANT COUNTY

## Highest infections, lowest vaccinations

### County has worst COVID-19 numbers in the state as more people are getting sicker

By Steven Mitchell  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Last week, Grant County had the highest rate of COVID-19 infections per capita in Oregon, and the county also has the worst vaccination rate in the state. The county's rate of COVID-19 infections was 625 per 100,000 people, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. As of Sunday, Grant and Coos counties have the lowest vaccination rate in the state, 17.4%, according to the CDC, which calculates based on complete vaccinations.



Eagle file photo

Grant County Public Health Administrator Kimberly Lindsay

On Sunday, Kimberly Lindsay, Grant County public health administrator, estimated that around 30% of the county's residents are partially or fully vaccinated.

Lindsay said the county has stopped requesting additional vaccine doses from the Oregon Health Authority because of a lack of demand. She said the county put first shots into the arms of 73 residents last week, along with 273 second shots for the two-shot vaccines.

On Monday, Jessica Winegar, health department clinic manager, said the health department had 1,200 doses on the shelf that she would not be taking to that day's vaccination event.

Lindsay estimated that roughly 200 or more people would get their Moderna COVID-19 booster shots this week with 30 more getting the first shot in the series.

The CDC has paused distribution of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Greg Armstrong, the owner of Len's Drug, told the Eagle they have more doses at the pharmacy than people

coming in to getting the shot.

"I am very concerned," Lindsay said. "With 70% unvaccinated, that leaves just over 5,000 people available for COVID-19 to move through freely. That's a lot of room to roam."

With the uptick in cases, including 14 new cases announced Tuesday, Lindsay said the county will move into the extreme risk level, which further restricts businesses,

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Eagle file photo  
Rebekah Rand, emergency medical services director with the Blue Mountain Hospital District prepares a vaccine shot at a January vaccine clinic at the Grant County Fairgrounds.



## John Day residents support police department

Pavilion filled to capacity as people express concerns on police, projects and budget

By Rudy Diaz  
Blue Mountain Eagle

A majority of John Day residents at Thursday's town hall showed support for keeping the John Day Police Department, but far fewer supported the funding option presented.

Ninety-eight people filled the the newly floored pavilion to max capacity to share thoughts with city leaders April 8 while 30 people attended the meeting virtually.

The future of the police department took center stage as a handful of comments and questions centered on the two options presented for law enforcement in the future: entering a law enforcement services agreement with the Grant County Sheriff's Office or seeking a local levy to fund the department.

Transitioning to the Grant County Sheriff's Office would mean the three current John Day officers would be transferred to the county sheriff's office at a cost to the city of about \$450,000 next fiscal year, according to City Manager Nick Green.



John Day City Manager Nick Green



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

The pavilion at the Grant County Fairgrounds was filled to max capacity for a town hall April 8.

Green said, if the city were to keep the department, three officers would be retained by the city with a new police chief hired by Sept. 1, Police Chief Mike Durr's set date for retirement. The cost would be \$655,405 next year, an increase of \$119,979 over this year's budget due to increasing costs and expenses.

The city would need about \$75,000 per year in local operating funds to keep the department, which would be covered by a five-year local tax costing John Day residents between 10 and 15 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value. A levy would need to be approved by voters in John Day.

The city would need a population of about 2,500 people or more to sustain the police department in the future without raising taxes, according to Green.

John Day resident and Dispatch Director Valerie Maynard said she is in favor of keeping the police department. She is favor of the council what kind of coverage would be provided to John Day if the city were to contract with the sheriff's office.

"The county is very large, and you can put three more county officers on, and they aren't

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