

# Levy rate to fund John Day Police Department increases

Voters to be asked to pay 50 cents per \$1,000 in assessed property value to fund police department

By Rudy Diaz  
Blue Mountain Eagle



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

The John Day City Council discusses the budget April 27.

John Day plans to let voters decide in August whether to pass a city tax to fund the police department, and the cost has increased from initial estimates.

The John Day City Council April 27 chose to pursue a local option levy of 50 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value and to collect the entire amount if it passes.

John Day City Manager Nick Green said the city would only need to collect 35 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value for the first year, but the city council decided they would prefer pursuing the full amount the first year to create a safety net for unexpected expenses.

"The ballot will go out at 50 cents, but to make the budget balance for the next fiscal year as submitted by the budget committee, we would only need to collect 35 cents," Green said.

City Councilor Heather Rookstool said it would be safer to collect the full amount because the extra funds provide a cushion.

Green said any funds left



John Day Police Chief Mike Durr

over can be carried forward to the next fiscal year. "I know you tried ... and put everything in there that you can think of, but there's always something that comes up," Rookstool said. City Councilor Dave Holland said Green's reasoning with the 50-cent levy is to make sure the city is covered over the next five years.

"As we put the budget together, we'll know what that levied amount needs to be to fill the gap," Holland said. "This year, we need 35 cents, but the next year we may need only 40 or 45 (cents)."

The amount collected could not exceed the 50-cent levy requested from voters. The 50 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value will add up to \$50 per year for every \$100,000 of assessed property value.

The city's legal counsel is currently working on the ballot measure, and it will be presented at the May 11 city council meeting where the rate plans and language will be finalized. The council will need to approve the language prior to submitting it to the Grant County clerk by May 14.

With the current police chief, Mike Durr, retiring this year, the job description for the chief of police position will be posted at the end of the week and will go through the Law Enforcement Data System. Citycounty Insurance Services will help vet and screen applicants, and the position will remain open until it is filled.

"The offer will be made contingent on the levy passing," Green said. "Provided nobody contests the results of the election, we would have an offer that could be made in August."

The John Day City Council also agreed that another town hall meeting, similar to one held April 8, would be a great idea prior to the August election date.

# Dispatch center successful since transition

By Rudy Diaz  
Blue Mountain Eagle

The Grant County Emergency Communications Agency continues to grow since it became its own agency in 2019.

Dispatch Director Valerie Maynard said things have gone well since the transition.

The dispatch team moved from the John Day Police Department to the John Day Fire Hall, which provided more space and the opportunity to design their work arrangements to correlate with their duties.

"The notable thing is that we now don't have the interruptions that we had at city hall with the background noise on the radio, and users appreciate the change," Maynard said.

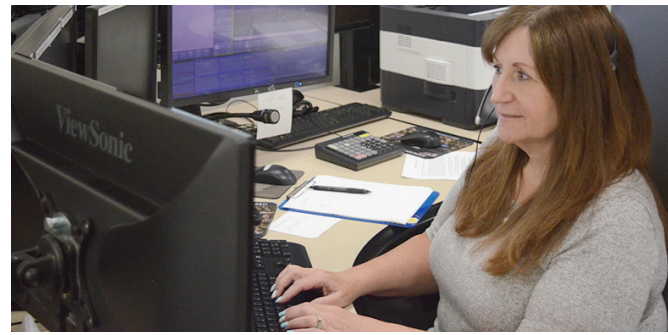
House Bill 2449, which was passed in 2019, has provided a growth in revenue for 911 dispatchers in Oregon.

The bill increased the fee for wireless and wired telephone accounts and prepaid wireless retail transactions to \$1 in 2020, up from 75 cents, and will rise again in 2021 to \$1.25.

"It went up a total of 50 cents from the 75 cents, which is huge," Maynard said. "We went from around \$70,000 to \$100,000 for a quarter in revenue for the first increase. That adds up, and now we're looking like we're in the black."

Maynard said the entities that are in the dispatch center's intergovernmental council — cities and other dispatch users — were happy the bill passed. The goal of the intergovernmental agreement was that the entities would cover some of the costs of the dispatch agency until there was a tax increase.

"Much like the PD, we were



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

Grant County Emergency Communications Agency Dispatch Director Valerie Maynard said the agency has been successful since its transition away from the city of John Day.

running on such a shoestring budget for many years prior to the transition," Maynard said. "Now we have a bit of a reserve, and we can keep building and then we can do things that we need to do to operate."

The dispatch center is waiting to hear back from a grant application to upgrade their radio system, Maynard said.

Maynard said the certainty and the knowledge that the dispatch center is not going anywhere anytime soon provides comfort for residents and employees.

The uncertainty of employment for dispatchers prior to the intergovernmental agreement provided a great trial for the dispatch team.

"We didn't know, and it's very unusual that you go through something like that and people don't look for other jobs," Maynard said. "But everyone was dedicated to not make things fall apart, so they waited until the last minute to know if they'll be employed, and we were at full staff when we moved."

The relationship with the city of John Day also took a hit when the discussion of the transition began, but Maynard said

things calmed down.

"Even if it was a sound business decision on their part, it was not easy to hear that we now have to support ourselves and move somewhere else to work," Maynard said.

People asked Maynard if the current situation between the police department and the city is reminiscent to what happened with dispatch. She said yes, but she is not surprised about the discussions happening because of the budget and costs to maintain the police department.

"That's tough on (JDPD employees), but now they know that if they contract with the county, they have a job," Maynard said.

Maynard said a key benefit with keeping the dispatch local is the knowledge dispatchers have of the area and their awareness of locations.

A highlight of the job for dispatchers is working and serving in the community they love. She said the job takes a toll on a dispatcher emotionally, but they learn to adapt and have a passion for what they do.

"We thank the community and entities for their support, and we wouldn't be here without them," Maynard said.

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