

County reluctantly passes budget

'Fall-back' funding prevents most cuts this year, but long-term problems persist

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

After a contentious conclusion to a two-hour budget session, the county reluctantly passed its budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

The Budget Committee passed the budget on a 3-2 vote. The three Grant County Court members voted to approve the budget, while two of the committee's citizens voted against it.

Meanwhile, the court's third citizen member, Bob Quinton, vice president and commercial loan officer at the Bank of Eastern Oregon, abstained from voting on the budget to prevent delaying the process. By law, the county must submit a balanced budget before June 30.

Quinton said he would have voted no, but committee members Amy Kreger and Rob Stewart beat him to it with their votes.

Quinton, Kreger and Stewart said that the county is spending more than it takes in

and is relying on COVID-19 relief funding and the potential of more federal funding that may or may not fill holes in its budget.

"It appears that the court is relying on COVID-19 money that they hope can be used to fill the shortfalls," Quinton said. "This is not the answer, nor is it the responsible way for the government at any level to do business."

Kreger told the committee that the county would be in a situation where it will have to cut jobs instead of reducing hours and furloughing certain positions as the committee discussed in earlier sessions.

However, the committee scrapped the idea and opted for back-filling budget holes with COVID-19 relief funds and prospective legislation in Congress that could potentially increase the county's Payment in Lieu of Taxes funding to upwards of \$900,000.

"We can be proactive, or we're going to be in deep, deep trouble," Kreger said.

County Judge Scott Myers said the county would end up in the same place it found itself in at the end of this budget year.

"We talked about cuts," he said, "but we didn't make any substantial cuts."



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

From left, Budget Committee citizen members, Rob Stewart, Amy Kreger and Bob Quinton.

He said the county has "fall-back" funding this year and "potentially" next year.

What the committee decided

Economic Development office

In the county's Economic Development office, the committee decided to cut its assistant position to 30 hours a week and moved \$6,000 in COVID-19 relief funds to back-fill the position if needed with court approval.

Sheriff's patrol

The committee decided to move the sheriff's forest patrol under the Grant County Sheriff's Office in the budget. Treasurer Julie Ellison said the position was initially supposed

to be a part-time job, budgeted at \$14 per hour with no benefits. However, full-time Deputy Dave Dobler, who earns roughly \$50 per hour, has been in the position. Grant County Sheriff Todd McKinley said he could not speak to why Dobler had been put in the position but that he puts in a "yeoman's work" and did not deserve to be punished.

Predator control

The committee decided to budget \$35,000 for predator. Hamsher said he heard the Grant County Farm Bureau would set up a taxing district if the county could support the predator control position for two more years. Kreger said the Farm Bureau told her that

they would walk away from the efforts of setting up the taxing district if they did not see an "honest effort" from the county.

"They just need a commitment from our side that this is viable to the county for two years," she said.

How did we get here?

Kreger said the increase in full-time employees and the cost of employee benefits had costed the county. She told the committee that the county needs to reevaluate those costs.

Ellison said the county has given over \$600,000 to the health department.

"We never gave them a dollar when we owned it," she said. The county sold the building to Community Counseling Solutions roughly two years ago.

She said the county paid out over \$100,000 to predator control and added two new positions at the county jail at \$100,000 apiece.

"We're going to be in the hole," she said. "We have no extra money coming in."

County Commissioner Sam Palmer said that the county lost sawmills over the last 30 years.

"We've become one of the highest unemployment coun-

ties in the state," he said, adding people were once working and thriving in the county. "We used to be one of the highest in the nation."

Quinton said he agreed with Palmer's assessment but said "on the other side of the coin" that spending needs to go down as revenue goes down.

Myers concurred with Quinton that the county had not cut spending. Myers said PILT and COVID-19 relief money would not be a "fix."

"I think it's just a delay," he said.

How do we ensure it doesn't happen again?

Myers said the county had made mistakes and oversights over the last couple of budget cycles.

"We've learned lessons along the way," Myers said. "We learn a lesson every budget year."

Ellison said she told the committee last year that the county needed to start cutting costs and freezing hiring when the budget was adopted. She said she hoped that her warnings would be taken seriously.

Kreger asked that the county provide a mid-year update of the county's budget to the committee members.

Residents request county revive Contracts Review Board

Grant applications among requests for review

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Residents are requesting the county consider reviving its decades-old Contracts Review Board and adding grant funding applications to the list of agreements for committee review.

Grant County resident Charlene Morris told county court members during the May 26 session that the county had a review board over 20 years ago and that she would like to help the county with the contract and grant application review process.

"I firmly believe that the county needs some help from their constituents about approving grants and contracts," she said.

Morris said she was disappointed with a proposal that has since been rejected to receive a Project Turnkey grant that various county social services offices worked on. The funding

would have provided financing to buy and convert a hotel into transitional housing.

Morris said millions of dollars flow through the county's Economic Development office. She asked if department head Tori Stinnett had met with the Farm Bureau or the Cattlemen's Association.

In a Friday interview, Stinnett said she would be open to meeting with both groups.

"They are more than welcome to reach out to me to collaborate and grow ideas," she said. "I want to be clear that I am not ignoring any groups or think that other groups are not as important as others."

County Commissioner Jim Hamsher said that the department attempted to contact ranchers in the county during the early days of the pandemic.

Morris told the court she is "absolutely, completely opposed to taxpayer grants."

"It's just mind-boggling how

much money in the last year or year and a half has come into this county, through state and federal tax dollars, in the name of a grant," she said.

Myers said, to an extent, it bothers him too, but he pointed out the services in the county that would not exist without grant money.

He said those services include Head Start, education and preschool. He said many of the parents of those children could no longer afford that education for their children without the funding. Morris asked the court how those parents got by without assistance in the 1960s, '70s and '80s.

Hamsher said K-12 education was not mandatory during that time.

Myers said grant applications and agreements go to the county's legal counsel for review. Nonetheless, he said he would look into whether the county would be obligated to have a contract review board by statute.

BUSINESS MANAGER—GRANT COUNTY ESD

Grant County ESD is seeking a Business Manager/Deputy Clerk. The business manager directs the operations of the Fiscal Services Department to provide effective and efficient business services to schools and the ESD and to assist the superintendents in providing the best possible administrative services to constituent district employees and ESD personnel with the financial and human resources available. The Business Manager/Deputy Clerk will often work beyond an eight-hour day and a five-day week to take care of daily work, attend meetings, conferences and district/school activities. The business manager must have extensive knowledge of GAAP, budget laws and regulations, demonstrated knowledge of the audit process. Must have excellent communication, problem-solving and small-group process skills. Must frequently make decisions; use independent judgment and/or independent action; mentor, use discretion; and analyze problems. Ability to verbally respond to common inquiries from various people. Frequently present and teach or train. Must have the ability to read and interpret documents, write routine reports and correspondence. Confidentiality is crucial. Workloads are heavy and timelines can be unreasonably short and inflexible. Requests and issues are often received which require immediate attention and conflict with other priorities.

Position reports to the superintendent, supervises the fiscal services personnel, and is ultimately responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Fiscal Services Department.

PERFORMANCE RESPONSIBILITIES

- Enforces district accounting practices and policies to affirm that all financial records are maintained in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP), Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB), district policies, and federal, state, and local laws or regulations.
- Researches, interprets, and understands current and proposed regulations, accounting principles, and other statutory requirements.
- Provides management and oversight or performs the following accounting services and activities: accounts payable, accounts receivable, cash receipts, contracts, fixed assets, general ledger, payroll, purchasing, grant accounting, student body funds, debt management, ADM student reporting and accounting, and treasury.
- Provides counsel, expertise, and guidance to the superintendent, the boards, district staff, administrators, in financial and human resource matters.
- Oversees grant accounting including expenditure reporting and auditing of expenditures to submitted budgets
- Oversee and manage the software accounting system for district revenues and expenditures and cash management in accordance with generally accepted government accounting principles and district policy.
- Assists, leads and directs the budget process in accordance with Local Budget Law; coordinates, plans, and oversees the development of the district budget; monitors budget expenditures to ensure compliance and a positive financial status, in accordance with District, State and Federal Guidelines, and GASB Standards
- Performs a variety of revenue forecasts and cash flow analysis; prepares revenue and expenditure projections; invests funds for safety of principal, liquidity, and for maximum return.
- Attends all school board meetings; take minutes, prepare and present reports/responses related to the financial status of the district and other matters under their responsibility.
- Communicates effectively with customers at all levels (management, clerical support, regulatory officials, and component district personnel) to clearly ascertain the concerns raised and respond courteously, promptly, and accurately.
- Maintain general ledger; generate reconciled monthly financial statements, prepare journal entries as needed.
- Manage, report, and draw down funds for all district state and federal grants.
- Oversee internal auditing system to ensure accurate tracking of financial information in preparation for yearly external audit.
- Maintain records required by district policy and state statute, including bid files, contract, etc. Prepare and submit reports and records required by state and federal agencies and district superintendents.
- Responsible for monthly payments of employee insurance premiums and payments to savings plan(s) as selected by the employee.
- Responsible for monthly PERS payments and reconciliation of the account.
- Responsible for maintenance of current and accurate files on all active and inactive employees as related to payroll records, insurance, PERS, and leave reporting.
- Provide Human Resource services for all employees, including assisting with health insurance options, PERS, life insurance, etc.
- Responsible for accurate monthly payroll. Prepare payroll checks and direct deposit stubs for distribution and maintain payroll records, prepare ACH for bank, ensure all payroll liabilities (including federal and state taxes) are correct and paid timely. Prepare all quarterly and annual payroll reports.
- Perform other tasks and work-related duties as requested by the superintendent.

QUALIFICATIONS

- Bachelor's Degree in accounting or a comparable field or evidence of equivalent knowledge of accounting principles, data processing, accounts payable, accounts receivable, and payroll procedures.
- Knowledge of Generally Accepted Government Accounting Standards with five years of progressively responsible governmental fund accounting, preferably in a public school or educational institution.
- Demonstrated skills in accounting software, data processing, spreadsheets, and word processing (such as Visions Fund Accounting system, MS Word, and Excel).
- Ability to operate standard office equipment with 10-key proficiency.
- Excellent written and oral communication skills with a high degree of accuracy.
- Ability to exercise judgment and integrity on the job with confidentiality, tact, and diplomacy.
- Ability to work independently prioritizing tasks to meet deadlines while maintaining a high degree of accuracy and attention to detail.
- Ability to maintain confidentiality of sensitive and confidential information related to personnel, employee contracts, and legal matters affecting the district(s).
- Must be bondable and never been refused a bond.

COMPENSATION: The position is full-time and year round. The compensation package is competitive with similarly sized districts and negotiable based on experience. Candidates must possess, or be able to obtain, an Oregon Driver's license and pass a background check including fingerprints

Timeline: Applications will be accepted immediately and duties will begin as soon as the successful applicant is available.

APPLICATION PACKET CONTENTS:

- A completed application form from Grant County ESD (<http://www.grantesd.k12.or.us/employment.html>)
- A resume including three current references

All Application materials will be sent to:

Grant County ESD
attn: Robert Waltenburg, Superintendent
835A S. Canyon Blvd.
John Day, OR 97845

Applications may also be dropped off at the above location during regular business hours.

Grant County Education Service District is an equal opportunity employer and complies with all applicable state and federal statutes and regulations in employment and district programs. Equal employment opportunity and treatment shall be provided in recruiting, hiring, retaining, transferring, promoting, and training of all employees regardless of the individual's race, religion, color, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, marital status, age, or disability.

Committee Volunteers Needed

Grant County is now recruiting volunteers to serve on active boards and committees.

Obtain an Application to Volunteer from County Court, 201 S. Humbolt, No. 280, Canyon City OR 97820; (541-575-0059) puckettk@grantcounty-or.gov Applications are due by Tuesday, June 15th, 2021.

Committees are formal public bodies required to comply with Oregon Public Meetings Law ORS 192.610.

College Advisory Board

Seven members plus three ex-officio members serve a three year term and meet monthly to promote local educational opportunities and identify educational needs within the community.

Extension & 4-H Service District Advisory Council

Eleven members serve three year terms and meet semi-annually to provide guidance and assistance to local OSU Extension staff in planning, developing, and evaluating balanced educational programs directed to high priority needs of county residents. Membership is limited to one re-appointment.

Library Advisory Board

Seven members serve four year terms and meet monthly to promote public awareness and support of library services, receive public input, review and update library materials, and coordinate activities with the Grant County Library Foundation. Membership is limited to one re-appointment.

Natural Resources Advisory Committee

Nine members serve one and two year terms. Members must live in Grant County and constitute a representation of agriculture and livestock production, timber and wood products production, recreation, hunting and fishing, water resources, mining, cultural resources and advocates for natural resources stewardship through continuation of the customs, culture, health, safety and economic stability of Grant County.

Planning Commission

Nine members serve a four year term and two alternates serve a two year term, meeting as needed to review land use and zoning applications and discuss city and county growth issues and siting new facilities. Members must be residents of various geographic areas within the county and no more than two voting members shall be engaged in the same kind of business, occupation, trade or profession with agriculture designations of livestock / forage crop production and horticulture / specialty crop production. Commissioners serving in this capacity must file an Annual Verified Statement of Economic Interest with the Oregon Government Ethics Commission. Members must re-apply to the County Court before their term ends if they wish to be re-appointed. The commission is a formal public body required to comply with Oregon Public Meetings Law ORS 192.610.

Wildlife Advisory Board

Created by Resolution 1993-29. Nine members serve three year terms and meet as needed to discuss issues regarding big game management and make recommendations to Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, including tag allocation and hunting season structure as they relate to population and damage of property.ocation and hunting season structure as they relate to population and damage of property.