

Ballots

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“community-oriented” policing that they and others value.

Lastly, according to Green, if voters have “buyer’s remorse” and decide they do not like contracting, it would be challenging to reconstitute a police department because they would essentially be building back everything from scratch.

“All of the communications, protocols and staffing,” Green said. “It’s a lot of work to rebuild a department from scratch.”

Arguments against the levy

Why not amend the city’s budget and keep the police?

People opposed to the levy have argued the city needs to prioritize.

Green said that the argument to reprioritize the city’s budget ignores 20 to 30 years of population decline and job loss in both John Day and Grant County. This, he said, puts more “downward pressure” on the budget.

According to Green, if fewer people are working in the community and fewer people are building less, there is less total contribution to the tax base.

Additionally, he said the argument for amending the budget ignores the rising cost of law enforcement, which, he said, every community currently faces.

He said the city generates about \$300,000 in taxes but pays about \$500,000 a year to fund the police department, which has been in the negative for 20 years.

Green said those costs include collective bargain-



Eagle file photo

A sign outside the John Day Police Department.

ing agreements because of additional regulations from the state because of training requirements. It’s costly to train and equip police officers, according to Green. He said it costs about \$110,000 a year per officer to maintain a department on average.

He said the arguments to

“tighten the belt” miss the point that the city has lost residents for over 30 years.

There’s no more “belt-tightening” to do, according to Green. Instead, he said the city needs to reinvest in its economy, housing, and job creation and provide incentives for businesses to expand.

Green said many of these criticisms are from a lack of understanding of fund accounting. He said the city is subsidizing the police department with transfers from public works and general fund revenues to pay for police and that he does not know where people are recommending the city make cuts.

For instance, he said people complain that the sewer and water bills are too high, but some of the money they are collecting for sewer rates cover police operations costs.

He said the other argument he makes against amending the budget is that the city runs leaner than any government, at 7% overhead, and slimmer than most nonprofits, he contends.

‘We want police, not tomatoes’

During a town hall session, Green said one of the criticisms

the city received was that they spent money on projects like a city-owned greenhouse and now cannot afford to maintain the police department, prompting someone to say that they “want police, not tomatoes.”

Green said the greenhouse was initially funded with revenue from the sewer fund. He said then it went to income from the Community Development Fund. Both, he said, are enterprise accounts and not funded through the city’s general fund.

He said, if the city closed and sold the greenhouse today, all of the revenue would go back into the sewer fund, and it would not change one cent in the general fund, and it would not change the conversation about it police at all.

“It’s not a choice between police and tomatoes,” Green said. “It’s a choice between police and not police.”

Control

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Bureau testimony on April 14 and sent his other testimony from a personal email address on April 29.

Farm Bureau testimony

In Robertson’s Farm Bureau testimony, he states:

“Please accept this input as testimony on behalf of the Grant County Farm Bureau, who is supportive of continued funding for the County Predator Control Program.”

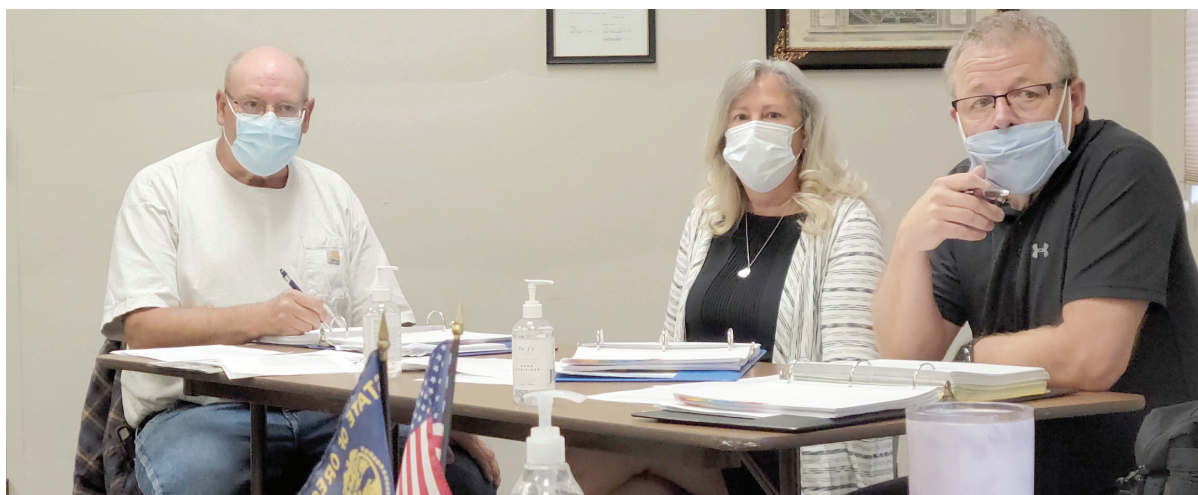
Robertson said the program had been beneficial to landowners and talked about the growing problem of invasive species management.

However, nowhere in the statement does he bring up the prospect of the county establishing a taxing district. Instead, he said rural farm and ranch landowners take little in county services despite making up a lion’s share of the tax revenue.

Personal testimony

In his April 29 email to the court members, Robertson starts off with the following:

“This is personal testimony regarding the County’s continued support of the predator control program and not that of the Grant County Farm Bureau or anyone else who I represent.”



Eagle file photo

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

He writes that the county can form a predator or animal control district with taxing authority. While people do not like the idea of more taxes, they might be able to organize something if they are without services, he said.

Robertson informally asked the court to consider funding the control program for an additional two years with the understanding that the funding would “sunset” after two years.

After that, a portion would go to establishing an animal damage control district. Then, another piece would secure a commitment for cost-share funding from other

sources to operate the program. Finally, a combination of tax revenues and cost-share would replace the county’s general fund contribution for animal control.

He offered to prepare a “brief request” for the court to take to the Budget Committee and court for a hearing.

Grant County Farm Bureau’s position on predator control

Robertson said the state owns wildlife in Oregon, although the federal government retains partial ownership of certain species protected under federal law.

Private landowners, he said, pos-

sess rights reserved under the Oregon and U.S. constitutions to protect their personal property from injury caused by wildlife. He said private lands are some of the most valuable habitats remaining in nature. Inherently, Robertson said, there will be issues created by the state’s desire to house their wildlife in those privately owned habitats.

“The GCFB asserts that landowners should first have maximum flexibility and independence to prevent injury to their property from the state’s wildlife and, to the extent that the state limits or impairs landowner’s rights to achieve a pur-

ported benefit to the public, the state should compensate landowners for damage their wildlife causes to private property,” Robertson said.

Robertson said, although it’s only one of many tools used by local government and landowners, predator control is a significant measure for helping offset the considerable expense landowners incur housing the state’s wildlife and for lowering operational losses that reduce on-farm economic viability.

‘No harm, no foul’

Robertson said the county’s budget and fiscal policies have many “moving parts,” and some of these funding issues have been ongoing for many years.

Additionally, he said, private business owners and local government representatives wear “many hats,” and it’s challenging to keep them all straight.

He said the Farm Bureau and he, as a private citizen, had spoken informally to the court in the past about a taxing district for nuisance wildlife control as well as for other “important local government service.”

“It would be very easy and completely understandable to confuse who was representing what particular issue in the heat of the moment,” Robertson said. “Really, though — no harm, no foul.”

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Keep your Local Police Department!



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YES
on Police
Levy**

The Life YOU Save Could be Your OWN!