

## Police

Continued from Page A1

able to transfer its \$375,000 COPS grant to the county. If the grant turns out not to be transferable, the city would pay \$371,000 a year.

The county proposal makes no mention of any county road funds coming to the city.

Palmer made it clear at the City Council work session that he couldn't speak for his fellow commissioners but said he would present the city's response to them.

"I myself can't make a decision, obviously," he said. "I would have to take it to the court."

The proposal drew a variety of responses from the City Council.

Some council members suggested the way to go might be a countywide bond measure to increase the budget for the Sheriff's Office, so it could hire more deputies to improve law enforcement coverage countywide.

Councilor Heather Rookstool said her chief concern was making sure the residents of John Day had a level of protection comparable to what they had before the Police Department was suspended.

"Our community is expecting police coverage, and they're not going to get John Day police coverage with a county bond," she said.

"Our community voted," Councilor Shannon Adair responded, referring to the failure of a police funding levy last August.

She added that the county's proposal would cost more than the city could afford.

"My concern is we're still paying more than we bring in in property taxes if we agree to this," she said.

"I think a proposal that singles out the citizens of John Day ... is not fair to our constituents," Councilor Elliot Sky said. "I would like to see the County Court consider (other options)."

Councilor Dave Holland suggested a middle ground.

"I think the whole problem needs to be addressed with the citizens of the whole county, with everybody paying in," he said, adding that residents of John Day and other incorporated communities could pay a higher rate in exchange for a higher level of law enforcement coverage. "I don't have a problem with that, as long as it's proportionate."

Adair and Lundbom also raised the issue of using money from the county road fund for city street projects, reminding Palmer that the City Council has been requesting a joint meeting with the County Court to discuss that request since early last year.

The county had said it needed an opinion from its attorney on whether those funds could legally be appropriated for city projects, but so far, they said, it has never provided such an opinion to the city. Last April, the city had its attorney draft an opinion on that question and provide it to the county, but the city has not yet received anything in reply, they added.

"I want to see a response to that (opinion) before we respond to this (proposal)," Adair told Palmer.

Palmer said he bring the city's legal opinion before the County Court, even though he thinks police funding and road funding should be separate discussions.

"Get it to me and I'll put it on the next agenda," he said.

Several members of the public rose to speak during the work session, calling for action on law enforcement funding.

"We are already in a state of emergency with regard to law enforcement," Prairie City resident Frances Preston said. "We need to do something through the County Court to take care of the county sheriff and his deputies."

## Plan

Continued from Page A1

The BIC subcommittee revised the list of conditions pertaining to a number of key issues, including access, elk security, wilderness and other set-asides.

### Forest access

In its final draft document of desired conditions, the BIC's access subcommittee wrote forest access was the most contentious topic during the 2018 forest plan revision process.

Committee member Bill Harvey said the forest roads have been used by people in rural areas for 75 to 80 years.

Harvey, a Baker County commissioner, said people have lived, worked and played in the Blue Mountains their whole lives.

"Why, in God's name," Harvey said, "would we want to take that right away?"

### Public use

The group writes that the public desires to be well informed on forest access. It want the agency to provide an up-to-date and comprehensive inventory of all forest roads and the status of those roads.

This was an important desired condition for subcommittee member Mark Owens, a state representative from Crane, who told the Eagle last year that he understands certain areas have wilderness or wildlife designations restricting motorized vehicle access. But he wanted to learn what roads are open and what roads are closed and why they are closed.

He said he wanted to see which roads were closed through the National Environmental Policy Act and which roads were closed by the Forest Service administratively.

"If they're closed through NEPA, we really can't get it back open unless we go through NEPA,

but if you're closed administratively, then those are open for a conversation on the subject," he said.

According to the final document, "use restriction of a road previously reviewed and approved through the NEPA process should be clearly and effectively posted for the public and reflected on updated maps."

### Elk security

The group writes that forest road and trail system use, density and habitat conditions may have some negative effects on wildlife in general and specifically on elk distribution.

The desired condition is that habitat is managed to provide a balance of adequate nutritional resources, cover, and human disturbance regimes that encourage elk to remain on public lands. Collaboration and coordination occur that benefits these desired future conditions by addressing the many other factors such as predation, hunting, and private land practices that also effect elk distribution while providing year-round recreational and cultural opportunities and limiting agricultural damage on private lands.

### User-created routes

The desired condition is to establish objective criteria for user-created routes, such as evaluating historical maps and aerial imagery to determine if the agency should include the forest system.

The routes would be evaluated and analyzed at the project level for social, cultural, historical, economic, habitat and environmental concerns while, at a minimum, seeking to ensure access in the general area.

The evaluation would coordinate with local and tribal governments with ample public notice and involvement through the NEPA process. As a result, the public and groups that frequent the routes would be well informed and allowed to comment on changes in management actions.

### Wilderness, habitat and set-asides

Last year the subcommittee asked the Forest Service's Dennis Dougherty, a recreation planner, Nick Goldstein, a regional planner, and Trulock about the process of recommending set-asides within a forest plan.

Dougherty talked about the difficulties during the 2018 plan revision. However, he told the group his biggest takeaway was complying and comparing each component with the overarching forest plan.

Dougherty said it is important to remember the forest plan does not designate motorized usage on forest roads. Instead, those provisions come from the travel management plan.

He also told the group that some areas are statutorily designated. Also, he said, Congress identifies certain set-asides as well.

He explained a Forest Service document, the "suitability-rating table," used during the last revision, which lists management areas, activities, land allocations and designations that the forest can use to make access and land-use recommendations.

Dougherty said he recognized the framework as cumbersome and complicated because of the plan amendments over the years. However, he said it is the Forest Service's general approach to determining land uses.

The Forest Service's Tom Montoya said these administrative recommendations go through a review process under the National Environmental Policy Act.

Trulock said the goal was to come to a collective understanding about the Forest Service's process: Even if there are no additional set-asides, they still have to go through the analysis to get to that point and make that recommendation.

The final draft of the desired condition was to understand that the forest service has to evaluate the suitability and eligibility through the forest planning process for future set-asides.

That said, the subcommittee does

not see the need for any additions to set-asides.

### Baker's minority report

Baker County Commissioner Bill Harvey submitted a minority report disagreeing with the BIC access subcommittee's final draft of the desired conditions document.

Harvey writes that special interest groups, agencies, and tribes disregarded forest management principles the Eastern Oregon Counties Association compiled in a 2019 document throughout the subcommittee meetings. Meanwhile, Harvey noted that this let other counties make too many concessions.

Harvey writes that Baker submitted several edited versions of desired conditions, and the subcommittee offered "minimal regard" for the county's input.

Local governments know their counties best, Harvey writes.

"And it's ridiculous to be overridden by committee members that have no authority or knowledge of what is best for the citizens of this county," Harvey added.

Trulock said that the BIC's charter allows for the submission of the minority report.

Ultimately, he said, the Forest Service would have to make decisions through the forest planning effort, which will include alternative drafts and a public comment period.

Grant County Commissioners Jim Hamscher and Sam Palmer, who both served on the BIC, said they knew there would need to be compromises.

"You're never going to everything you want," Palmer said. Palmer said he was happy that all of the entities began working with each other early in the process, which, he said, did not happen in 2018.

"We brought all the agencies up to the table at the front end instead of the back end," Palmer said. "In two years we had a product when before they had one that got scrapped after 15 years."

## Pool

Continued from Page A1

shows that support for the measure is strongest in the district's incorporated areas, with 55% of respondents in John Day and Canyon City saying they would definitely, probably or possibly vote yes to 41% who would definitely, probably or possibly vote no. In unincorporated portions of the district, the margin was 51% yes to 46% no.

Most women of all ages (69% of those 18-49 and 52% of those 50 and older) said they would likely vote for the measure, while just over half of men aged 18-49 (52%) said they would vote yes. The strongest opposition was found among men aged 50-plus, with 59% opposing the measure.

Weigum said the board is awaiting updated construction cost estimates from the project design firm before determining exactly how big a bond to go out for, but it should be in the \$3 million to \$4 million range.

"We should have a really good idea in the next couple of weeks," she said.

The survey shows only a slight difference in support between those two price points. When asked if they would support a \$3 million bond measure, 52% said yes and 42% said no (with 6% undecided) as opposed to the 51%-45% split at the higher cost level.

The level of support creeps up a

little more when framed in terms of a household property tax bill. A \$3 million bond would work out to 53 cents per \$1,000 of assessed valuation, or \$106 a year for the owner of a \$200,000 property. For a \$4 million bond, the same property owner would be billed 72 cents per thousand, or \$144 a year.

When surveyors laid it out that way, 55% of potential voters said they would support a \$3 million bond with 42% saying they would oppose it, compared to 54% for and 44% against a \$4 million bond.

One variable that will factor into the cost estimates is the kind and number of options incorporated into the design.

The basic plan for the aquatic center includes just an outdoor pool and an 8,000-square-foot structure for locker rooms, office space, mechanical rooms and so forth, with space for a small warm water exercise and wading pool that could be added later.

But the design could be tweaked to allow for the pool to be enclosed at a later date to enable year-round use. Some 48% of potential voters said that design would make them more likely to vote yes while 7% said it would make them less likely to vote in favor and 44% said it would make no difference.

Respondents were given a list of potential design options and asked how important each one would be to them personally. The option to enclose the pool for year-round use tied for the highest ranking, with 47%

saying that was extremely important or very important to them. The same percentage valued providing space for water aerobics and exercise classes.

Providing a lap pool was rated extremely or very important by 38% of respondents, while 31% said they valued providing rental space for family celebrations, parties and community meetings; 21% wanted a water slide; and 16% placed high importance on a climbing wall.

Weigum said the board is hoping to keep the bond measure at the \$3 million price point, even if that means a pool with fewer bells and whistles.

"We want to minimize the financial impact," she said. "The survey tells us there's more people that feel comfortable with that \$3 million mark."

Surveyors also asked why people would vote a certain way.

The top five reasons cited by "yes" voters were:

- For the community
- It's needed
- For the children
- Growth/attracts families
- Swimming lessons/water safety

Among "no" voters, the top five reasons were:

- Can't afford/fix income
- No more taxes
- Not needed/waste of money
- Poor management/don't have the budget

More important priorities/police force shut down

Weigum said the parks and rec board recognizes that people have

all kinds of reasons for supporting or opposing the ballot measure and that the board's job is to provide the recreational opportunities and amenities that district residents want.

"If this is an opportunity our community wants, we're going to provide that," she said. "If people want a pool, they should vote for it. If they don't want a pool, they should vote against it."

Weigum emphasized that the survey only included voters who live inside the district because they are the ones who will be deciding the ballot measure and who would be taxed to pay for the bond.

"We're letting the people who will be voting for this and who will be paying for this be the drivers," she said.

A plan was floated in 2020 to expand the parks and rec district's boundaries to include other Grant County communities as a way to spread out the cost of building a new pool, but that plan was dropped after it failed to garner resolutions of support from city councils in the target area.

The measure will appear on the ballot for either the May 17 primary or the Nov. 8 general election, but Weigum said the board is shooting for the earlier date.

"We're still on track with that," she said. "We're hopeful we'll see it in May."

If the measure makes the May ballot and voters approve it, the new aquatic center could be open to the public by the summer of 2023.

# It's in your inbox before your mailbox

In these uncertain times, be certain you can read your newspaper

## Sign up for free digital access

Subscribers can receive daily email updates and uninterrupted digital delivery on a computer, tablet and smartphone.

Call 800-781-3214

The Blue Mountain  
**EAGLE**

BlueMountainEagle.com/newsletters

