

Voters to face library levy increase in fall

The Columbia Press

Voters can expect to find a request on the November ballot for continued operation of Warrenton Community Library.

City leaders agreed to a five-year local option levy that would raise the current library tax rate from 33 cents to 38 cents. After giving the plan a supportive nod Tuesday night, the city commission's official vote on the ballot measure will occur at their next meeting.

"The clear heart and soul of the library system has always been its people," said Kelsey Balensifer, chair of the Warrenton Community Library Board.

Other public libraries in the county have an average of one employee for every 6.7 hours the library is open, she told commissioners. Warrenton's library has 12 hours of operation per employee.

A community library was established in Warrenton by ordinance in 1993. For 15 years, Warrenton's property owners paid 9 cents for every \$1,000 of their property's assessed value to support the small



Warrenton Community Library is at 138 S. Main Ave.

library based in a city-owned building in Hammond. The small sum paid for one part-time library director and just 22 operating hours per week.

The building's structural deficiencies required the city to find a new library location and in 2017, the library was moved to its current location on Main Avenue after voters chose to tax themselves 33 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value.

The current levy raises about \$190,000 per year to support library operations.

During the past five years, a full-time library director was



Balensifer

hired, an automated check-out system put in place, ebooks were added to the available options and the library is open six days a week.

"It seems the mission should be 'Service above and beyond the boundaries of time, service and staffing,'" Balensifer told commissioners.

Staffing levels need to be increased for the library to remain a vital service to residents, she said, adding that she has confidence in Warrenton's voters.

"Every five years, when asked to support library levies, they have risen to the challenge," she said.

County approves plan for short-term rentals

Short-term rentals, which have been the subject of much debate during the recent housing shortage, will be allowed in 16 zones in unincorporated Clatsop County, commissioners decided June 22.

They adopted an ordinance formally recognizing them and directed county staff to develop a process and timeline for evaluating a potential cap on the number of short-term rentals permitted.

"We've spent time listening to various concerns and perspectives and we thank everyone for their involvement," Commission Chair Mark Kujala said. "We're now enter-

ing the next phase of evaluating where and how caps on short-term rentals might be applied in certain zones."

Short-term vacation rentals – defined as allowing no more than 30 days per stay – have been licensed for many years throughout the county.

In April, commissioners approved revisions to the permit program, which shortened the license period from five to two years, created a tiered complaint response and penalty system, and made other revisions.

The board voted in August 2021 to place a moratorium on new short-term licenses.

The moratorium has been extended twice and is in place until Aug. 26. As the board considers the imposition of caps, the board may choose to further extend the moratorium. Staff will present the proposed timeline and process at an Aug. 3 work session.

Owners and operators of short-term rentals in unincorporated parts of the county are required to obtain permits through a multi-step process that includes reviews and approval by county planning and public health offices and in-person site inspections.

Operators also must pay the county's transient room tax.

City OKs \$45 million spending plan

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Warrenton city commissioners approved a \$45 million city operating budget for the coming fiscal year and a \$9.9 million operating budget for the Warrenton Urban Renewal Agency.

Commissioners also adopted the city's five-year capital improvement plan, which spells out projects and large expenditures expected in the years ahead.

The budgets and the improvement plan are the result of months of planning, studying, public hearings, and decision-making by all of the city's departments.

A budget committee made up of the five commissioners and five members of the public gave initial approval to the 100-page city budget document in May. Tuesday night's actions made the budget committee's earlier approval official.

How will the city's \$45 million be spent? While residents are welcome to view and comment on the entire budget in person and in de-

tail, few do.

Much of the money collected through property taxes goes into the general fund, which includes police, fire, administration, building and planning, parks, and the municipal court.

And then there are a variety of separate funds – where money comes in through user fees, grants, special taxes and other sources -- that pay for the two marinas, water, storm and wastewater treatment, garbage collection, the library, the community center, street maintenance and more.

The capital improvement plan lists various projects (paving, wastewater treatment plant improvements, etc.) and purchases (a new fire truck or computer system), and shows where the money will come from to pay for them and what year that's supposed to happen.

All of the budget documents and the capital improvement plan can be found on the city's website, ci.warrenton.or.us.

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