

Request 25% increase

County elected officials say they are underpaid

By Steven A. Powell
Morrow County officials say they are underpaid and if Tuesday morning's session of the county budget hearing is any indication—they are going to do something about it this year if at all possible.

County budget hearings are open to the public and the budget committee was scheduled after press time to decide on what days the committee will meet.

In his opening remarks, County Judge Don McElligott said the general government fund is going to increase with the major amount coming from requests for salaries. He said the different department heads will be attending the budget hearings and justifying their own budgets.

He said the road funds are "sharply up" because of new personnel, new equipment and increased prices in energy such as gasoline, diesel and asphalt. He said a road

committee has toured the roads in the county and set up priorities.

"The road department is starting a new course," McElligott said. "We are building a three or four year comprehensive plan."

McElligott said the north to south Morrow County road will be finished when the Bombing Range Road is completed. Other projects included in next year's proposed budget are Wilson Road and Olson Road.

In his concluding remarks on the budget message, McElligott said resources will be about the same as last year but he is not sure whether both an A and B levy will be needed until the budget committee completes its changes in the requests.

Since salaries showed the largest increase, the budget committee decided to look at those requests first.

The county court appointed

an eight-member committee of county employees to study salaries for officials in the state of Oregon.

The committee found that Morrow County officials are underpaid and they recommended bringing the salaries equal to the state average.

The salary committee recommended that all county elected officials (sheriff, justices of the peace combined, treasurer-tax collector, county clerk and county assessor) be paid \$21,720. They recommended that the county judge receive \$25,000.

Presently, the county clerk makes \$15,695, the judge makes \$17,028, the sheriff makes \$15,695, the treasurer \$11,326, the 5th district justice makes \$16,770 and the 6th district justice makes \$10,939.

Those are some hefty pay increases but the salary committee says they are justified because they are only average for the state and they

have been underpaid for a long time.

"We have to establish a system for salaries involving personnel," McElligott said. "We have to stick with an equitable system because changes can cause dissension."

County commissioner Dorothy Krebs said the salary program should include a step system for automatic raises every 2½ years. She said the program will award longevity with the county and would not be considered on merit because there is not a personnel manager who could decide merit.

Commissioner Warren McCoy said the pay raise is warranted but the voters are going to say, "Boy, oh boy, look at those jumps in salaries."

McCoy said federal and city officials are paid more than the county officials are.

County nurse Pat Wright

said county employees received a pay raise of seven percent last year but the cost of living was up 14 percent "so I really did not get a raise in pay but a cut," she said.

"Comparisons put our salaries to shame," Wright said. "School employees are paid more."

"Before I took office I always heard nobody works here," (at the courthouse) McElligott said. "Well, I see very few people loafing around here."

Commissioner Krebs said the salary for the county judge is set for increasing 46 percent but she thinks Judge McElligott "deserves" it.

"I expected a \$20,000 to \$22,000 when I took office but I can defend making \$25,000 now, because I know what some other officials make," McElligott said.

"The Port of Morrow manager gets \$28,000 a year and he

is getting a raise."

County Assessor Greg Sweek was the first to try and justify why he should get the increase. He said he is responsible for assessing about a half a billion dollars a year in property.

History shows that the assessor in Morrow County received \$12,735 in 1977-78, \$14,599.94 in 1978-79, \$14,595 in 1979-80 and is requesting \$21,720 for next year.

Commissioner Krebs said she recommends a 25 percent increase for all elected county officials to \$19,618 and then hit the \$21,720 figure next year because it would be more acceptable to the voters.

"I would like to say give them the \$21,720 but I am afraid the voters would say 'My God, what are they doing up there?'" Krebs said.

"I agree with Dode (Krebs)," McCoy said. "I don't think the voters would squawk about the increase if

they sat here (on the budget committee). We are 20 years behind and we are going to have to modernize one of these days and it's going to cost money to do it."

Budget committee member Daniel Creamer said the turnover at the courthouse in recent years shows that the pay is not high enough and that if people do not want the courthouse to be a "training ground" for other businesses, salaries will have to increase.

At press time, the budget committee had not decided how much of a raise the employees should get.

In the proposed budget requests by the different department heads of the county, the sheriff's budget was requested to increase from \$184,235 to \$220,565.

The 6th district justice court request is for \$22,220, up from \$16,474. The major increase in that budget is the salary request of \$17,945, up from

\$10,939.

The 5th district justice court is requesting \$22,295, up from \$20,020. Again salary increase is the major addition to that request.

The county court is requesting \$60,568, up from \$50,944. The county judge increase of about \$6,000 is the major addition.

The county clerk budget is requested to increase from \$31,759 this year to \$46,334 next year.

The county assessor's total budget request is for \$135,876, up from \$100,960. Of that budget request, the major addition again is in salaries, which will rise from \$76,260 to \$107,576.

All of the figures mentioned are requests. At press time the budget committee had not approved any of the requests. Once the requests are approved by the committee, the voters will decide on the total budget at the May 20 election.

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16 pages

HEPPNER, OREGON



County roundball
teams enter
district playoffs
See sports pages



Students in Judy Maas' first grade class at Heppner Grade School received American flags from local Lions members John Edmundson and Dave Thom last Friday in honor of Washington's birthday.

In county court proposal

Attorney says, 'Abolish courts'

By Steven A. Powell
Boardman attorney F.E. Glenn was a leader in north Morrow County opposing the combining of the two justice courts.

But after the county court appointed committee ruled against combining the 5th and 6th district justice courts, Glenn surprised a lot of people by drawing up a proposal to abolish both justice courts. He submitted that proposal to the county court last week.

His proposal is to abolish both justice courts when the current justices' terms expire Dec. 31.

In its place, appoint a full-time violations clerk in Heppner to serve the new district court judge that will be coming to Heppner weekly for one day beginning July 1.

In Irrigon, appoint a full-time county services clerk who will be given the authority of a violations clerk, deputy county clerk, deputy tax collector, deputy sheriff, and deputy planning director.

His recommendations in-

clude having the county district attorney travel to Irrigon at least twice a week.

Glenn says his recommendation is cost effective because it eliminates two positions and replaces them with two lower-salaried positions. Its only increased cost is travel for the district attorney.

He said that once the district court comes to Heppner, it will handle most if not all Oregon State Police traffic citations so there will not be as much of a need for the justice courts.

Glenn said the combining of the two courts was not politically acceptable to the people of north Morrow County because the people there felt the south was trying to "short hand government" in the north. He said abolishing both courts would be more acceptable to the people in the north because the county services clerk who would replace the justice would have more government powers.

Paul Jones, who was the chairman of the committee

that investigated the possibility of combining the two courts, said the county court should look at Glenn's proposal seriously.

Jones said leaving the system as it is, as the committee recommended and the county court agreed with last week, does not make sense because the two justice courts combined do not handle as many cases as the average justice in Oregon does. He said unless it is changed, the county will have to wait six years until the next justice terms expire before it can change the system.

Jones said the county can make it a full service district court handling most of the cases and a justice of the peace could be added later if the need arises. The State of Oregon pays the district judge. Jones said in his minority opinion to the county court.

County court information shows that the 5th district court in Irrigon is requesting an 11 percent increase in

salary to \$18,286. The 6th district court in Heppner is requesting a salary increase from \$10,939 to \$17,945, an increase of about 64 percent.

"I don't necessarily think I should get a 64 percent increase but I do think the two justices should be paid the same," 6th district justice Charlotte Gray said. She said she does not care if the county has to cut 5th district justice Ernest Jorgensen down in salary just as long as they are paid equally.

Gray said the 5th district court is complaining about her large request for an increase but they may stop complaining if the county court adds both of the present salaries and cuts them in half so both justices are paid the same.

The committee that looked at the combining of the courts said it did not see any chance for a cost savings but a look at a comparison "guesstimate" by district attorney Dennis Doherty does not back that up.

Doherty's figures show that combining the courts could

Increases total \$85,122

City faces A & B ballots

Heppner voters will be voting on an A and B ballot at the municipal special election March 25.

The A ballot is for the amount of \$76,094 that is outside the tax base and its six percent limitation that the city is allowed to increase by law. If the A ballot measure is approved, city administrator Marshall Lovgren said the taxes levied will be financed partially by the state of Oregon.

The state will not partially finance all of the amount approved in the city budget for 1980-81. Local taxpayers must totally finance \$46,478 of the levied taxes. That amount will be on the B ballot.

The A ballot must pass for the budget to be approved by the voters. The B ballot cannot pass unless the A ballot does. If the B ballot passes but the A ballot does not, both ballots

are said not to have passed but the A ballot can pass without the B ballot passing. If the A ballot passes, the city can try in later elections to pass the B ballot.

The city budget committee approved the city budget for \$551,030 for 1980-81. The budget for 1979-80 was \$465,908, an increase of \$85,122.

Total materials and supplies were approved for \$88,145, up from \$64,085 in 1979-80.

Capital outlay was cut from \$1,500 this year to \$500 next year.

Total general government is up from \$79,379 to \$133,767. The budget committee made a lot of cuts in this area as the different department heads requested a total of \$182,932 in their budget requests for this year.

The swimming pool fund will rise from \$7,984 this year to \$9,894 next year.

The sanitary funds will double from \$750 this year to \$1,500.

The police section of the budget will increase from \$72,231 this year to \$83,472 next year if the voters adopt the budget. The police budget in 1978-79 was \$57,093. The police chief will get an 11 percent raise from \$15,729 to \$17,460.

The volunteer fire dept. budget will rise from \$6,778 this year to \$9,369 next year. The fire budget in 1978-79 was \$4,930.

The library fund will be \$7,755 with the approved budget, an increase of only \$385 from the \$7,170 budget this year.

The position of librarian was requested to increase to 25 hours a week and with the 15 percent increase the salary would be \$6,256 but the budget committee decided to keep the position at 20 hours and with the 11 percent salary increase that was approved for all city employees the librarian salary will be \$4,832. It was \$4,353 this year.

The total general government portion of the budget is for \$224,757. The amount requested was \$301,725 and the amount last year was \$174,292.

The street budget increases from \$62,150 to \$64,164 in the budget.

Of the proposed increases in the budget \$49,409 is within the tax base and its six percent limitation and \$122,482 is outside the limitation and will be voted on the A and B

ballots. A levy of \$64,461 for bonded indebtedness has already been approved by the voters in the 1973 bond election.

Water, sewer rates take hike

In an effort to increase the city revenue to aid the city budget, the city budget committee is planning to recommend to the city council that increases be made in the water and sewer rates.

City Administrator Marshall Lovgren said he expects the council to adopt the committee's recommendations. The last time sewer and water rates increased was in June of 1976, Lovgren said.

Sewer rates will increase a flat rate of \$1 from \$3.50 to \$4.50. Lovgren said the re-

sources are expected to rise from \$35,000 to \$42,800 with the rate change.

Increased water rates will increase those resources from \$67,000 to \$77,579.

For the first 1,000 gallons of water, the charge will increase from \$5.50 to \$6.50. For up to 4,000 gallons will be added a five cent charge per 100 gallons. From 4,000 gallons up the cost will be 20 cents per 1,000 gallons. There will be no discount for users of 80,000 gallons of water or more as there previously has been.

New postmaster named

Kenneth L. Nairns, a career postal official in Bend, has been appointed the new postmaster in Heppner.

He will succeed to the vacancy created by the recent retirement of Hubert Wilson, taking over officially March 21. Nairns, 46-years-old, currently is supervisor of mails and delivery in the Bend Post Office.

In a telephone interview last week, Nairns said he and his wife, Loretta, are looking forward to their move to Heppner. They have visited the community several times, having come here in the hunting season.

"I like the small-town, community life," he said.

A native of Shamokin, Pa., Nairns grew up as a coal miner. He served a four-year enlistment in the Navy, from 1951 to 1955, and after his service returned to coal mining.

With the economic decline in the coal industry, he said, he shifted to construction mining, and it was in this capacity that he came to Oregon.

As an employee of the Emil Anderson Construction Co., a Canadian firm, he worked on the Clear Lake Project for the Eugene Water and Electricity

Board. This was to construct a diversion tunnel nine feet in diameter, two miles long, through Brown's Mountain, that now carries water to the McKenzie River.

Nairns said his brother also came out from Pennsylvania and was employed on the project. "My brother got killed and I buried him in the Bend cemetery. I fell in love with Bend and stayed."

Nairns has been with the post office since 1966, rising through the ranks from substitute clerk and carrier to clerk, and to his present position as a supervisor, which he has held since 1974.

Nairns and his wife have two sons, one employed in computer work in Florida, the other at home.

The new postmaster's appointment was announced in Pendleton by Cecil Fischer, the sectional mail center manager. Fischer said Nairns was chosen under the postmaster selection program of the U.S. Postal Service, in which vacancies are filled through competitive examinations.

Fischer said Nairns would receive in-service training before taking over his new job.