

County seeks funding for new sheriff storage building

Considers cutting police car purchases to pay for it

By David Sykes

In an effort to find money to build a new sheriff's department storage building in Heppner, the Morrow County Commission last week looked at cutting funding for the purchase of new police cars. The county is facing a \$300,000 shortfall between construction estimates and budgeted funds for the new facility and is looking for places to find the money.

Building a new Emergency Management storage building became necessary this year when the county lost its lease on its current storage building at the old mill site in Heppner. Building owner, Port of Morrow, sold the building to local businessman Jay Coil, who plans to move his fabrication business there, and the sheriff's office has been notified to move all its things out by November. The county did have a right to purchase the building for \$100,000 but turned that down to allow for a local business expansion.

The county first considered building the new storage facility on county-owned property next to the Sheriff's Office in the Lott's Addition, however, residents in that area objected, so commissioners dropped the idea. The land now being considered is owned by the city of Heppner but will be free as the city has offered to donate the property. The Soil and Water Conservation District has also been asked to provide access to the property across their lot bordering Highway 207.

The county hired Engineering Northwest from Ontario to come up with a price estimate for a new building. The engineers came back and said a new 60 X 80 ft wooden structure would cost the county an estimated \$549,000 to build.

When first confronted with the \$300,000 shortfall, commissioners considered using federal COVID-19 relief funds to make up the difference, however at its Sept. 9 meeting the commissioners seemed to shift gears and began looking for money instead within the sheriff's office's own budget and other sources. An analysis by county staff showed if the sheriff's office held off purchasing new vehicles as quickly as customary it could save \$200,000. That along with several other sources of funds (see table) it could come up with most of the funds. The analysis looked at using money the county receives from the Strategic Investment Program (SIP) connected to wind and other energy projects around the county (\$50,000), and also from payments in lieu of taxes it receives from the Portland General Electric gas generating plant located near Boardman (\$50,000). The analysis showed even with using

these funds, there would still be a \$48,400 budget shortfall.

County Sheriff Ken Matlack and Undersheriff John Bowles attended the Sept. 9 meeting to discuss the building specifications and proposed vehicle budget cuts with commissioners. Commissioner Don Russell was in favor of cutting back on the size of the heating and cooling system for the building to save money, and also going with a less expensive pole building structure. "One concern is the cost of the building and how are we going to pay for it?" Russell asked. He pointed out that he didn't think an expensive heating and cooling system was needed for the entire building since it would be used mostly for storage "I think the AC unit is overreach for a storage facility. The engineer estimate is for a \$70-\$80m heating and AC system. I think that is overreach for dry storage for mostly vehicles. I am wondering if a well-insulated pole barn with better insulated office and evidence area would suffice?" he asked. He said air conditioning could be done in the office areas and then in the rest of the building where the major equipment is held a gas heater could be used just to keep the building from freezing in the winter.

Russell said he was concerned with the half million-dollar cost of the building which he thought could be built for less. "I just think a pole barn can be built for substantially less than \$550,000." He wanted the county to explore getting a building at a cost closer to the \$250,000 budget. Russell also did not like the idea of taking money from the sheriff's vehicle budget to pay for the building.

Commission Chair Melissa Lindsay said she spent time walking the current site and building with Sheriff Matlack and feels the county should build something similar and not be down grading. She said the proposed building is not an overbuild and it will be housing county property, not just the sheriff's and "all the stuff that is in there needs to be taken care of," she said.

Sheriff Matlack said he did not want the county to down grade the new building too much with the sheriff's office ending up with a less suitable facility than present. "I'm looking at the building we have had for these years and it has served a really good purpose. It's not just a storage building. We are able to do work there. I get concerned when you talk about a heating system where it says just above freezing. I am concerned it will be less similar to what we have now," he told the commissioners. "I want to make sure the cooling sys-

MORROW COUNTY Sheriff Station # 2 Funding Analysis		
	AMOUNT	DESCRIPTION
Goal:	\$ 549,000.00	NW Engineering estimate
10%:	\$ 54,900.00	Potential Cost Over-Run
EST FUNDING NEED	\$ 603,900.00	
	\$ (250,000.00)	Budgeted 2020-2021; 101-199-5-40-4412 "Sheriff's Building"
	\$ (200,000.00)	Hold the purchase of Sheriff Vehicles
	\$ 153,900.00	
	\$ (5,500.00)	Kinzua Building Lease Terminated; 101-117-5-20-3770
	\$ 148,400.00	
	\$ (50,000.00)	PGE-Carty; "Long Term Goals" 521-521-5-50-5242
	\$ (50,000.00)	SIP Funds (#201, or 202), or Beginning Fund Balance
	\$ 48,400.00	

tem is workable so we can use it when we do projects there. It doesn't make sense to build a building that is inadequate," he added.

In cutting his vehicle budget Matlack said if the vehicle purchase budget is cut \$200,000 thus lengthening the time between vehicle purchases, the county will end up spending more money on maintenance and repairs and that would not save anything. "We (currently) had no repairs because the cars are rotated before everything starts going wrong with them. We have to be able to drive faster than the public drives. When you are putting more miles in a rotation like that with high speed pursuits, that's not the way to go," he told the commissioners.

Lindsay said the building engineer cost (\$549,000) is just an estimate and they are still working through the details. "This is just an estimate. It is not the bid. I think we need to wait until we get the bid and then figure out where we are going to get the money," she said. Lindsay said she had not expected the budget shortfall to have such a big impact on the sheriff's office with the proposed delayed vehicle purchase. "We need to spend more time talking about where the dollars are coming from. Until we have a bid, we don't know what we are going out for. When I saw how you wanted to pay for this (out of vehicle purchases), I thought the sheriff is taking it on the chin and he shouldn't have to," Lindsay said. She also wanted to know where Russell and the sheriff came up with the proposed \$200,000 cut to vehicle purchases. "Where did you see how we were going to pay for it? Did someone tell you," she asked, unaware that the analysis had been done by the county administrator and included in the commissioner's weekly information packet (see table). "I did not realize that, I thought we were still working through it (finding funding)," she said.

Matlack was also concerned that his office would have to move all of their equipment out of the build-

ing by November and a new facility would not be ready soon. He said his office will have to store things at various locations around Heppner and that will cause quite a bit of inconvenience before the new facility is ready. He said they would be storing some things at the fairgrounds and other locations. "If we have stuff stored at the fairgrounds, there are high school kids you might usually have inside for their (baseball) batting practice. Now we have taken that away from them," he said. "I see it (construction of the new building) dragging on and it is going to impact other people besides us." Matlack did say he was in favor of the county trying to get the price of the building down, he just did not want the sheriff's office to have to settle for a less usable space.

Lindsay said the commission could talk more about where the money was coming from once the actual contractor bids came in, and they had a firm construction figure. "This is not a budget (engineers estimate), this is just a plan. I think this is a worst-case scenario. I jumped into this (new building project) as a pet project and I am not trying to shove a building down anyone's throat. This is not my building. The sheriff's office made the statement, 'it is your stuff find a way to store it.' And I heard that pretty loud and clear. We have to find a place to store our stuff. I'm not trying to push a building if nobody wants it. I think we need it and I think it's perfect. I'm just trying to piece this together," she said. "I've spent a lot of time on it, but I'm not attached to it," she added, "I think we need it."

After discussion, the commission voted unanimously to put the project out for bids with the reduced heating and cooling system requirements as suggested by commissioner Russell and discuss where funding would come from once a firm contractor's construction figure came in from the bidding process.

Spiritually Speaking

It's not fair

By Fr. Thankachan Joseph SDB, St. Patrick Church

"It's not fair" is often a catch phrase that we repeatedly hear from people of all walks of lives. Though we live in a world that believes in a sense of fairness and equal rights - "equal pay for equal work," "equal opportunities for everyone" - quite often one's sense of justice comes to the forefront only when one's own well-being is concerned, never mind if others' rights are trampled.



Fr. Thankachan Joseph

Does generosity to others beyond "justice" have any place in our vision of fair play? Scripture readings may challenge our sense of fairness and generosity towards our fellow beings.

Isaiah (Chapter 55:6-9) initiates with an exigent call to come back to the Lord, even though it is a relatively calm time during the exile of the Israelites in Babylon. He reminds us that it is easy to forget the Lord in times of peace and tranquility and only call on him in moments of threats and situations we cannot manage. We need to look frequently towards God to discover how we should live. And Isaiah places before the readers the true nature of God in verse 8 when he says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts nor are your ways, says the Lord." God's ways and plans are beyond human calculations and imaginations. Secondly, Isaiah reminds the Israelites that God's ways and thoughts do not emulate our own: "Yes, the heavens are high above the earth as my ways are above your ways, my thoughts above your thoughts." Isaiah is calling our attention to the difference between God and humanity by signifying the distance of earth from heaven.

The Gospel of Matthew (20:1-16) speaks of the generosity of God through the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. The vineyard owner goes out at daybreak, finding workers for the vineyard and offering them about a denarius as a wage. At different hours later, he continues to find persons who are idle and sends them to his vineyard to work. The Palestine customary practice could have been that at the beginning of the day, laborers are lined up in the street corners waiting for work, most likely as the harvest season draws to a close. The landowner contracts them for the usual daily wage and happily they go off to work. He goes out again throughout the day and hires more workers. More surprisingly he goes out again near the end of the workday, finds trailing would-be workers and hires them, not mentioning to them about their wages.

The issue in this parable comes at the end when the landowner calls the laborers for their payment at the end of the day. Those who had come at the last hour receive a whole day's wage and are delighted, while those who came at the first hour are expecting that they will get more than they had contracted for. Yet they receive the same daily wage. Their anticipated joy turns to grumbling: "It's not fair! These last ones worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who bore the day's burden and heat." The grumblers' complaint is that "you have made them equal to us." They are angered not by what happened to themselves but are envious about the good fortune of the latecomers. They thought they would receive more. When we compare ourselves to others, we easily fall into envy and resentment.

In this allegory the landowner is God himself. This parable of the workers is an instance of how the thoughts of God are so very different from ours; they are on a higher scale than ours. Our earthly minds respect fair play and hard work. We set a just reward for hard work. So does the landowner in this story, who pays the contracted sum, a just wage to all. God rewards our endeavors, but His generosity goes beyond justice and He gives more than what we deserve, chooses to give more than what some earned. The focus of the parable is the surprisingly generous landowner. Jesus's listeners might think of a magnanimous God who always likes to share His goodness.

From author John R. Donahue, SJ: "The attitude of the grumbling servants distorts their view of the world. The parable summons us to believe that God's justice played out in the world is not limited by human conceptions of strict mathematical judgment, where reward is proportionate to effort or merit. The mercy and goodness of God challenge us even though they do not exist at the expense of justice. Categories of worth and value by which humans separate themselves from others are reversed in God's eyes. Not to rejoice in the benefits given to others is to cut ourselves off from those benefits we have received."

God is beyond our expectations. He is more generous than we expect and deserve.

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