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The INDEPENDENT

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"Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley"

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Salmon watching time...



There has been very little rain, but salmon have been returning to spawn in the upper Nehalem River and its tributaries. This photo was taken from Anderson Park near the confluence of the Nehalem River and Rock Creek.

WGS safe from dry rot, not earthquakes

When the Vernonia School District Board of Directors met at Mist School, October 10, Superintendent Mike Funderburg said that a preliminary analysis of the structural integrity of Washington Grade School (aside from seismic safety issues) made him more comfortable. Unlike the previous board meeting, when he said he wasn't sure he would be comfortable with his child attending WGS, "now I feel safe." Board Chair Carla Strand, in response to a question from the audience about the safety of the building, said that three board members have children at WGS. Maintenance Supervisor John Lewis also said that he would send his children to WGS.

According to Funderburg, the preliminary report indicates no structural safety issue related to the dry rot that was exposed by a search for areas of mold growth. Though the building remains at risk during an earthquake because of the unreinforced masonry construction, the engineer told Funderburg that there did

not appear to be any change in the roofline or bowing in the walls that would indicate structural problems. Funderburg said the engineer indicated that, while the building is not built to current code, it was "very sound" except in regard to seismic safety.

With the conclusion of the engineering study, Funderburg said, Clayton Group Services (CGS) can complete air quality testing. In response to a question from the audience about the presence of asbestos material, Funderburg explained that the asbestos is a ceiling in a storage room with no air circulation.

CGS recommended removal of the ceiling because of water damage and potential for mold growth. Because asbestos can be removed only by certified technicians, the procedure is quite expensive. All supplies will be removed from the area and it will be closed, according to Funderburg. Lewis will also begin work to repair areas of dry rot and seal leaks in the roof.

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Will county law enforcement levy really provide resident deputies?

Opinion

Unsigned opinions are written by Editor Noni Andersen.

Columbia County is seeking a \$14,046,609 five-year local option levy (Measure 5-109) for law enforcement, or about \$88 per \$100,000 of assessed value. There is no doubt that additional funds are needed by the Sheriff's office. What is doubtful is whether it will accomplish what its supporters want.

First, some background: State law requires counties to provide jail space and serve legal papers, it does not require counties to provide law enforcement in the form of patrol deputies. When voters approved mandatory jail terms via Measure 11, counties were also required to take more prisoners. Some funds come to the counties along with the increase in prison-

ers, but the amount is inconsistent.

Columbia County voters responded positively when its 39 inmate jail had to be replaced. A new jail was built that can legally hold 195 inmates. At this time, it averages 150 prisoners per day, many of them federal prisoners. In the last fiscal year, July 2001 through June 2002, nearly \$600,000 was earned by renting beds for federal prisoners.

The current staff of 20 licensed officers and 7.5 civilians is about six people less than what was projected as necessary for the new jail. If the levy is approved, Sheriff Phil Derby and the Board of Commissioners want to add eight deputies and two civilians.

That's the jail component. On the law enforcement side, in addition to the sheriff and undersheriff, a sergeant and two detectives, there are 13 deputies and five civilians. Eight of the deputies and one civilian are grant-funded and have specif-

ic duties because of the grants, additionally, three of the grants have or will expire.

The wish list here includes 14 deputies (including the expired grant-funded positions) and two civilians. The sheriff has repeatedly said that two of the new positions would be resident deputies in Vernonia and Clatskanie.

The levy would also be used to hire an additional deputy district attorney.

These are good goals and Sheriff Derby and his staff have shown themselves to be thoroughly committed to efficient, fiscally responsible operations. The Board of Commissioners has stated its support of these goals.

The resolution adopted by the commissioners specifies what the funds would be used for — personnel, equipment, additional operating costs and other law enforcement purposes.

Doubts arise because there is absolutely nothing in the resolution about

resident deputies. Nothing segregates the funds in two parts — Jail operations and Sheriff's office operations. It specifies positions, but there is nothing to guarantee that new hires will be for patrol purposes; several deputies have already been taken out of general law enforcement duties and put into jail operations.

These concerns are not intended to question Sheriff Derby's commitment, but county residents have no guarantees that he will be here next year. Personnel changes are a normal part of government. We don't know who the next commissioners will be or whether they will have the same view of law enforcement priorities. Remember, county patrol officers and general law enforcement are not required by state law; jail beds are required. If there are insufficient funds to operate the jail, it is conceivable that the law enforcement levy would be nothing more than a large jail levy.