

COLUMBIA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
BOARD MEETING

WORK SESSION MINUTES

May 12, 2009

The Columbia County Board of Commissioners met in a regularly scheduled work session at 10:00 a.m. with Commissioner Rita Bernhard, Commissioner Anthony Hyde and Commissioner Earl Fisher present, together with Sarah Hanson, County Counsel and Jan Greenhalgh Board Secretary.

Commissioner Bernhard called the meeting to order.

BUDGET DISCUSSIONS WITH LABOR GROUPS:

Jean explained that the Board has asked her to invite representatives from the 4 local unions to speak about the FY 2009-2010 budget. Only two have decided to attend, those being Michael Dunning of Roads and Parks Local #697 and Kathy McNeill, Courthouse Employees Local #1442. Commissioner Bernhard first wanted to say that the Board has looked very hard at the budget and tried to do what they could to be fair to all departments.

Michael presented some cost saving options and possible policy changes for the Road budget. 1) the Transportation Planner has suggested reducing the number of roads maintained in the county, spending approximately \$250,000 on the maintenance of 37 gravel roads with 3 homes or less. This would be a cost savings to the department; 2) the possibility of turning current roads inside the city limits over to the city. Commissioner Hyde explained how hard it is to have the city take over any county roads but is in total agreement; 3) come up with a "no idle" policy for road equipment, both heavy equipment and trucks. They go through a lot of fuel in the Road Department and there are many times that the equipment is left running when not in use. This is a huge waste of fuel; 4) there are currently 3 Road Supervisors and 1 Lead Worker taking their work vehicles home.

There may be some advantage to this in emergency situations, but that only happens rarely. This also puts extra wear and tear on the trucks along with extra fuel costs; 5) reducing or eliminating paid overtime. Facts - in 2008-09, \$65,000 was paid out in overtime - \$29,000 of that went to the three road maintenance supervisors. Supervisors are salaried positions and, in most places, do not get paid overtime. Jean clarified that the road supervisors, under federal wage law, are not exempt and qualify for overtime pay. That may be, but Mike feels there is a lot of jobs done on overtime that are not necessary and could be done during regular work hours; 6) He would suggest that each road district should have

their own budget for materials, overtime, etc. and be able to monitor their districts budget. Those supervisors would then be held accountable to Dave Hill for their budget; 7) Maintenance and repairs to road equipment and vehicles. The Road Department has been frugal in the past picking up used or inexpensive equipment. Some of that equipment is just getting too old and not worth putting good money after bad in repair costs. Perhaps some training on how to run the equipment might help on the wear and tear on the equipment and reduce maintenance costs; 8) There should also be some cross training on the heavy equipment so there is always coverage. Currently, there are only two employees that know how to run the grater, one being a supervisor; 9) During the summer months, the regular Road crew works 10 hours Monday through Thursday, which works out fine, but the mechanic works Tuesday through Friday. So there are times when the road crew is on and needs some mechanical work, and the mechanic isn't available. Sometimes, he has to be called in, which creates overtime. They should all be on the same schedule; 10) Mechanical repairs should be done at the St. Helens shop. Recently they are doing a lot more outsourcing. Some may be because the vehicle is still on warranty, but not all and a lot of the road crew is taking on more and more of the mechanic work. Recently, someone made the decision to call out an outside mechanic to do "maintenance" on three pieces of equipment and the cost was much more than it would have been if done in house. These were not repairs, simply maintenance. This could have been scheduled at the St. Helens shop for much less; 11) Discussion has been held and the suggestion made to raise the surface mining depletion fee and, working with the State to increase the gas tax. 12) The last thing is the cost of \$7.50 for haul permits. This is fairly low and he doesn't like to increase permit fees, but the loads seem to be getting heavier and heavier and perhaps that fee should be raised.

Kathy has been frustrated the past few months because the unions have not been included in the budget discussions. There has always been a spirit of cooperation here but not lately. Commissioner Hyde stated that, early on, he and Ruth sent out an email to everyone inviting comments. Commissioner Bernhard stated that she sent out an e-mail as soon as the Board had some idea of the cuts they would be facing. That e-mail discussed the possibility of furloughs, but did not set out any specifics. Kathy commented on the enforcement fees that should be increased. If Robert Crain fines someone for no permit, it's double the fee, however, if the building inspector is aware of non-compliance, the person just comes in and pays for the permit. It should be standard across the board. Further, there should be an automatic cost of living increase on all fees, as the cost to provide those services continue to rise. As for cutting costs, there are some staff that takes a county car home. Because work has decreased, this is not so cost effective anymore and should be eliminated. Besides, we now have more cars than inspectors. Another issue is the number of space heaters around the courthouse. This is not a very cost effective way to heat the courthouse. There

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should be an energy audit conducted on the county heating system. Commissioner Hyde stated that is in the process now. Regarding the issue of furloughs, this is a contractual issue and will need to go to the unions for a vote. She believes they would agree with the furlough if spread evenly throughout the employees.

Commissioner Hyde explained that Department Heads are given the option to handle it the best way for individual departments. This will definitely be a service cut and the citizens of this county need to understand that. Every year we have to make cuts and still try to provide services. That cannot continue to happen and people need to see the effects of reduced funding.

Mike feels that the unions would like to have been brought into the budget discussions prior to just getting a memo from the Board. With regards to the issue of reducing wages through a furlough, the contract states that union employees get 40 hours per week and, if there is a change to that, it needs to be discussed and voted upon by the union.

Commissioner Bernhard explained that the Board looked at a way that would have the least impact on the employees with the reductions in the budget. The State forecast will be out on May 15th and the Board will then have a better idea of where we stand.

Mike stated that communication should be open and a dialog started with the unions on the furlough issue. Kathy requested some detailed specifics to share with the union, such as how the furlough would effect benefits, etc.

Commissioner Hyde wanted to say that he continues to see whole companies closing down on a daily basis. The county employees need to realize the budget crisis we are in and that there is going to be cuts in services.

Kathy feels that by closing all courthouse offices one day per month, it would show the public the effects of service reductions.

Mike and Kathy thanked the Board for the opportunity to meet with them to discuss these issues. They will be meeting with their unions to discuss the furlough issues and will get back to the Board.

The Board recessed the meeting at 11:50 a.m. and reconvened at 1:45 p.m. with all present.

Commissioner Bernhard called the meeting back to order.

EXECUTIVE SESSION UNDER ORS 192.660(2)(d) - BARGAINING:

The Board immediately recessed the regular session to go into Executive Session as allowed under ORS 192.660(2)(d). Upon coming out of Executive Session, no action was taken by the Board.

REPRESENTATIVES FROM PUBLIC HEALTH DISTRICT:

The Board met with Jay Tappen, Chair of the Public Health District Board, to discuss budget issues. Commissioner Hyde talked about the plans for the county budget, such as furloughs and the elimination of COLA for department heads and elected officials. This may have an impact on the contract with Public Health. Hyde also brought up the resolution recently adopted by the Board regarding an early retirement offer to qualifying employees. Jay asked if he could get a copy of the early retirement offer. After discussion, the Board suggested a meeting with the Public Health Board be held after the election in July to address the contract between the County and Public Health.

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With nothing further coming before the Board, the meeting was adjourned.

Dated at St. Helens, Oregon this 12th day of May, 2009.

NOTE: A tape of this meeting is available for purchase by the public or interested parties.

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FOR COLUMBIA COUNTY, OREGON

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By: _____

Rita Bernhard, Chair

By: _____

Anthony Hyde, Commissioner

Recording Secretary:

By: _____

By: _____
Jan Greenhalgh, Board Secretary

Earl Fisher, Commissioner