

## Weekly Business Meeting Jan 4 2023

Commission Chair Herman Baertschiger announced he's done with trying to fund the Josephine County Sheriff's Department. At the Jan. 4 Weekly Business Meeting Baertschiger, responding to a question from Libby Watts he said, "I think the Board of Commissioners worked real hard in vetting with county residents. We had open houses. We had all kinds of things. Unfortunately it didn't pass. So I think the next step that it needs, to be, umm, citizen-driven and not Commissioner driven for it to happen."

Newly sworn in Commissioner John West had a different view expressed at the end of the meeting. "2023's gonna be a great year." We're gonna fund that sheriff."

The only business conducted during the Business Meeting was approval for Emergency Services Director Emily Ring to pursue a state Fire Marshall grant to help people establish defensible space around their homes in case of fire. She said the deadline for the application is Jan. 31<sup>st</sup>. Ring wants to build on a brush-clearing project last year that used contract crews of young adults but West expressed hope she could create jobs for local people with the grant. Vetting and monitoring 15 to 20 people for brush work would take more work than she and her staff can handle at this point, she said, so she preferred to go with the contract crew from a summer program for young adults. They worked for a stipend and amenities, she said. That started a conversation about a new state law that says people have to be paid minimum wage. Commissioners complained the youth crew will have to be paid now, along with prisoners who do any work while in jail.

Baertschiger asked Ring how much money she was applying for and she estimated all the projects she wanted funding for roughly totaled about \$90,000. Baertschiger pointed out there is hundreds of thousands of dollars in that Fire Marshall grant and she should go big and ask for a lot more. Ring said the grant funds projects and she was trying not to get so many that she couldn't keep up. "I don't want a big pot that will be so unwieldy I can't deliver on it," she said. Nevertheless, Commissioners urged her to revise her application to get more money.

There were seven people who spoke at the meeting during Public Comments. Perennial commentor Judy Aherns was called on first, as she usually is. She said she is holding a candlelight vigil Friday on the Courthouse steps. "We have prisoners sitting in crummy cells in DC because of Jan. 6," she said, inviting others to join her on the anniversary of the Insurrection at the Capitol. She also urged Commissioners to start their meetings with a prayer. "We're in a Christian community so I don't think anyone will be offended," she said.

Next up was Mark Jones who suggested the county pass an ordinance requiring people to clean up fire hazards on their property. Following him was Lynda Spangler who welcomed the new Commissioner, thanked the Board for the work they've done pushing better broadband access along, and urged them to get our state representatives involved like they are in Jackson County. "We need ours active and involved and I hope the project goes forward because it has a huge benefit," she said.

Libby Watts, who spoke two weeks ago about the Commissioners' war with the Courier and attempt to pull county legal ads, said "Two weeks ago, one of you, who isn't here now, told me I wasn't thinking clearly. So today I'd like to know how clearly are you thinking? I'd like to know what the next steps are for funding the sheriff. Are you going to take the lead or are you expecting a group of citizens to start the process? One thing is clear, it will be a monumental task to get any kind of tax passed in this county because of the culture of grievance you commissioners have cultivated over the years. Go back and listen to your meeting recordings. You constantly moan and groan about everything from the governor to the local newspaper. And you jump on anyone who shows up at this podium who disagrees with you. Maybe it's time for a New Year's resolution. Be more positive. Learn to disagree with grace. It starts with you.

Sheryl Eldredge said she was encouraged by West's campaign promise to work on homelessness in the county. She wanted to know what actions the Board might take and what that might look like if they started soon. Her questions never did get a response from any Commissioner.

Rebecca Anderson, who lives in the county but owns property in Grants Pass, pushed back on Baertschiger's debasement of the recently passed Constitutional Amendment taking slavery out of Oregon's Constitution and requiring payment for work done by the incarcerated. Anderson reminded Baertschiger and the Board that Native American advocate Grandma Aggie of Grants Pass once visited the Pope in order to get archaic verbiage out of the Papal Bulls that said it was ok to kill "heathens" and take their property and added, "sometimes our laws need to be updated." She told the Board that paying prisoners may turn out to be a good idea as the money they earn while incarcerated can give them a bankroll for finding housing when they get out. This might take care of some of the issues with homelessness, she said.

Dorothy Yetter called in to say "bravo" to Ring's efforts to get money to help with the significant fire safety problems we have in the county. She defined defensible space as "a natural or human-made area in which materials capable of supporting the spread of fire has been treated, cleared or modified to slow the rate and intensity of fire and to allow space for fire suppression operations to occur." She said as a homeowner with "considerable acreage" she knows how difficult it can be for people who can't afford or can't physically maintain a defensible space around their homes. She urged Ring to go for as much money as she can to help these people and to provide funding for more Fire Wise coordinators who can help people access that help. "As a Fire Wise Coordinator herself, Yetter said "I'm going to be calling on Emily to talk with her some more about how I can get involved with what she is doing in that area."

Despite being called out for constantly whining about the Grants Pass Daily Courier that Watts said made them look petty, DeYoung and Baertschiger said they weren't letting up in an emotional prattle that didn't make a lot of sense.

DeYoung, who bristles every time his name is mentioned in the paper no matter how benign, started his long rant about how the paper used to be wide open and non-controversial when he was a kid delivering the Courier. "And I've seen a turn in the paper in just 14 years I've been in politics. And I've seen a turn in the paper that really isn't...doesn't bode well for a good portion of the people, not a majority or minority." He went on about how the paper "prints a whole

bunch of mistruths” and accused it of sullying his late parents because of a line in a long article Jan. 1, 2023, that included information about new Commissioner John West’s finances. The article briefly mentioned Baertschiger and DeYoung’s finances and stated DeYoung had a rental. DeYoung took that as an insult to his parents and said, “I had to bury my parents to get that house...and I don’t like being slandered for that thing.” DeYoung went on and on about how anybody would be offended if their name was in the paper and said “that stuff that comes out in the Daily Courier I really take offence to personally and if it were aimed at you or anybody else in this room ...or anybody else out in the county you’d have some issues with it too.” The article didn’t mention where DeYoung got the rental, but now everyone knows he inherited it. DeYoung wasn’t at the meeting last time Watts spoke, but he said he watched the tape and wanted to address her concern about public notices. He claimed the Board was just looking at the best way to reach the public for the notices. In December Commissioners had discussed pulling the notices out of the Courier and giving the county’s lucrative public notice business to the weekly publication, The Illinois Valley Press. DeYoung tried to make a case that the Courier could go out of business at any time so they are just looking at alternative ways of getting their public notices out.

Baertschiger got off on the First Amendment without context in this meeting. He bellowed about how newspapers and houses don’t have First Amendment rights but the people inside newspapers and houses do and that the First Amendment is not a one-way street, “So I will always continue to support the Constitution and all the rights that go with it. Adamantly!” Although it wasn’t clear what he was talking about no one gets an opportunity to ask questions during Commissioner rants.

Baertschiger seemed most concerned with Ahren’s assertion that J6 insurrectionists were being held in “crummy cells.” He said he and Rep. Cliff Bentz have had several conversations and said it isn’t over whether or not those individuals are innocent or guilty but “the problem is they’ve been incarcerated almost two years without due process and that should scare the heck out of everybody in this country.” (In May, The Guardian [reported](#) that of the 398 defendants charged as of May 10, at least 330 were listed on the Justice Department website or in federal court records as having been released from custody. Some are still being held but they have been charged with violent acts and attacks on officers and several investigations found no one has been jailed because of their political beliefs) As far as Ahren’s request for prayer, Baertschiger said the eight years he was in the Senate “we had an invocation every single day so maybe that’s something we’ll discuss her in the future.”

Regarding broadband, Baertschiger said they will keep pushing forward on that, limited only by the amount of grant money they can get and “big hurdles in Josephine County ‘cause of terrain and how we can trunk out broadband.”

DeYoung addressed Anderson’s comment about how it might be good for prisoners to get out of jail with money in their pockets. DeYoung told her to contact Corrections Department Director Nate Gairan and ask him about recidivism. DeYoung allowed paying prisoners may help a few but “there’s some who will take that money you pay them for being in jail for something they did

that I didn't do and you're going to pay them to be in jail and then they're gonna go buy drugs with it and start all over again."

West didn't say much as the Commissioners on either side of him expressed their opinions but finally Baertschiger asked him to comment.

"I would like to thank everyone for your public comment and I would like to encourage the rest of the public to attend these meetings and give us their feelings, their good, their bad, and I'm ok with hearin' the bad. I'll get over it and we'll work through it and together we're a community. We're a Board of three but we'll work through it as a community. I don't really want to take the time breaking each one of these down. I've wrote down, tried to write down as fast as I could whatever one had to say so I could take it, digest it and work through any concerns you have or get back to you and so and stuff but I just want to thank everyone for makin' your comments and they are heard and we'll act on everything we can. Some things we're not able to act on maybe the way some people would like for us to but I believe this board has the community and our county's best interest at heart so we're gonna move forward with that. Thank you."

During Thursday's Administrative Workshop County Forester Dave Streeter talked about a timber sales contract with Estremado Logging, talked about how quickly bugs take over burnt timber and introduced Brian Braddock as the "next bald guy," apparently indicating he was training a successor. Commissioners then heard a presentation on bridges that will be fixed with federal money coming through ODOT. Bridges include those on the West Fork of Williams Creek, Lower Grave Creek Road and the Takilma Road Bridge on Democrat Creek. The presentation will be given again later at a Weekly Business meeting.

Finance Director Sandy Novak said she didn't have anything to report but they had a discussion about starting a reserve fund.