

Budget Committee OKs 2013 - 2014 Spending Plan With No Sheriff's Patrols
By Stacy D. Stumbo of the Daily Courier

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The Josephine County Budget Committee Tuesday adopted a budget without sheriff's patrols, but with enough money to keep the jail open for up to 100 inmates in fiscal year 2013-14.

The six-member committee, which is made up of three private citizens and all three Josephine County commissioners, unanimously voted to adopt a proposed \$3.965 million beginning fund budget for public safety operations, down from about \$12 million just two years ago.

Measure 17.49, a three-year tax that would have generated about \$9.1 million annually for the criminal justice system, failed earlier this month. Commissioner Cheryl Walker said even with "no additional prospect of any additional revenue" the committee should adopt a budget that would maintain most departments at their current service levels through July 1, 2014.

The committee decided to give the Sheriff's Office an additional \$312,200 from the general fund to keep up to 100 jail beds open and \$54,000 to the District Attorney's Office to pay for an additional part-time deputy to prosecute cases.

Sheriff Gil Gilbertson previously asked the committee for about \$649,700 to pay for patrols, jail operations and court security. The board found it could not afford to meet all the requests. It also denied an appeal from for the Public Health Department for \$135,000 for clinic operations, \$36,000 for the Women, Infants and Children program and \$14,000 for Animal Protection services.

Commission Chairman Simon Hare said this year's budgeting process will be simple compared to 2014-15, when there will be only about \$200,000 in carryover and more than \$4 million in services will have to be cut.

"We can cut everything to the bone and that still won't do diddly," Hare said.

The overall budget adopted by the committee is \$67 million, down from \$74 million in 2012-13. Most of the budget is made up of "pass-through" money from the state and federal governments that must be used for specific purposes, and cannot be redirected by county officials. Commissioners have discretionary use of only about \$7.8 million in the budget. That money is a combination of property taxes, nondedicated fees and carryover money.

The budget will not be final until after a June 19 public hearing and vote by commissioners.

Hare previously suggested that public officials take a 10 percent pay cut, but after further discussion, the committee decided against the proposal because those workers have not received a cost of living increase in four years. Commissioner Keith Heck made a pitch to reduce his salary by 33 percent, from \$75,000 to \$50,000 annually.

Chief Financial Officer Rosemary Padgett said state law allows for different positions on the board of commissioners to be paid at different levels, if the Budget Committee agrees.

Half of the committee — Hare, Walker and Jim Brumbach — voted against Heck's proposal. With a tie, the motion died for lack of a majority.

Hare called Heck's offer "valiant and "commendable," but said he could not support it because he believes commissioners "should be compensated equally. We are all equal."

Walker and Hare are saving the county money by bowing out of the Public Employees Retirement System program. Finance Controller Arthur O'Hare said the total savings to the county for a non-PERS commissioner is \$21,795 a year, which includes all taxes and benefits.

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