

Meeting with Lewis County Seniors Board

November 8, 2017

12:07 p.m.

Present: Commissioner Stamper, Commissioner Fund, Commissioner Jackson (by phone), Becky Butler, Steve Walton, Glenn Carter, and members of the Lewis County Seniors Board, including Michelle Whitten, Ron Averill, Don Bradshaw, Carol Brock, Mona Rae Fish, Zora DeGrandpre, Bob Bozarth, Jim Henderson, Fred Wilson, Fred Rider, John Panesko, Jerry Pratt, Allison Felt

Guests: Various audience members

Recorder: Rieva Lester

Members of the county and members of the Lewis County Seniors Board introduced themselves.

Jim Henderson said the Seniors Board requires up to \$300,000 in 2018, \$200,000 in 2019, and \$100,000 in 2020. He said the Seniors Board also needs to lease the buildings for \$5 per year.

Jim said it would be virtually impossible to provide a “hard-numbers” budget.

Don Bradshaw reviewed the amount of money available and the possibility of fundraising opportunities. He pegged the potential revenue at \$100,000. Don said the five centers have a combined total of \$150,000 on hand. Commissioner Fund asked for clarification regarding the 501c3 umbrella under which the centers fall. Don said they all fall under one umbrella.

Ron Averill said the Seniors Board is reluctant to give out a budget with multiple unknowns. He said he has reviewed the centers’ budgets and does not believe the Senior Board can be successful without start-up help from the county. He discussed socialism in regards to the well-performing and poorly-performing centers. Ron said he took a frugal approach to the budget and that an additional \$100,000 beyond what the county has pledged is needed to pay for utilities, etc. Ron stressed that the budget cannot be split 50/50 between Nutrition and Enrichment. He said the centers cannot survive without Enrichment.

Commissioner Stamper asked if the senior centers would be willing to use the \$150,000 they have squirreled away to support the centers.

Michelle Whitten said the group cannot bleed the other senior centers dry.

Fred Rider said he would be upset if his center’s hard-earned money was distributed to under-performing centers.

Don Bradshaw said he wouldn’t ask one center to pay for another. Rather, he said, he would ask the able centers to help contribute to the costs.

Don said the Lewis County Seniors Board ultimately has the responsibility to keep all centers open.

Ron said the county is being asked to provide a \$200,000 safety net above and beyond the \$100,000 the county already pledged.

Zora DeGrandpre said she is working on grant writing but is struggling because it's a fledgling group.

Becky said an additional \$200,000 would have to be a line item in the budget and would have to identify what the money was to be used for.

Commissioner Fund asked for clarification regarding "poor and infirm."

Glenn Carter discussed governmental programs that have means testing. He said that if the senior programs were limited to serving only the poor and infirm, there would be no gifting of public funds. However, he said, if the program were to extend to those who do not qualify as poor and infirm, the funding could be considered a gifting of public funds.

Ron Averill said the AAA contract indicates means testing is not allowed.

Allison Felt said her research indicates it would not be a gift if the program benefits the poor and infirm. She said the Senior Board's stance is that providing funding to the Seniors Board would not be a gifting of public funds.

Commissioner Fund discussed the need for data that identifies who is poor and infirm.

Glenn said his understanding is that there is no data regarding who is served by the senior centers.

Commissioner Stamper asked what data is needed.

Glenn said the program serves those who are poor and infirm as well as others. Glenn said the constitution indicates the county cannot provide funding for those who are not poor and infirm. He said there is no black and white answer. Glenn said it would be helpful to have information or data showing that the people who use the Enrichment and Nutrition programs are poor and infirm.

Don asked if the county could move forward with the assumption that 50 percent of those served are poor and infirm.

Allison said if the program doesn't move forward, there will be no support for the poor and infirm.

Jerry Pratt said if a decision isn't made today, the board will dissolve.

Ron Averill discussed Meals on Wheels and transportation services. He said the Seniors Board needs to expand and take over more to serve more of the community. To do so, he said, the group needs the county's help.

Don said he does not like ultimatums. He said if the Seniors Board resigns, he will not.

Jerry Pratt said it's not an ultimatum, it's a "we have to do it."

Becky asked for clarification regarding the budget the Seniors Board provided. She said the budget provided shows more revenue than expenditures, and she asked why the Seniors Board would require a pledge for additional funding.

Ron said the money would be needed to cover start-up costs and delays in revenue.

Fred Rider said the proposed budgets were not approved by the Seniors Board.

Fred said the BOCC handed the programs over to the Seniors Board merely six months ago – a \$750,000 business with merely \$47,000 in the bank. He said he will not be the fall guy for the county commissioners. He said the rent cannot be \$65,000 a year. He said it must be \$5 per year.

Commissioner Fund said the BOCC needs data. She discussed the need to attract more seniors to the centers, and she said very few counties across the state set aside funding for senior centers.

Commissioner Stamper asked if the county could lease the buildings out at a lesser rate.

Glenn discussed the risks of doing so. His primary focus would need to be to help the poor and infirm, with benefits to others being incidental.

John Panesko said the county has always had the risk of being called out for the gifting of public funds. He discussed the need to reduce the risk over time rather than try to eliminate the risk all at once.

Commissioner Jackson said he is not prepared to make that kind of decision today. He said the county is facing several other financial considerations, including insurance, in addition to the senior centers.

Commissioner Fund asked if the lease can be revisited. She discussed the possibility of pledging additional funding.

The commissioners said they would again meet with the Seniors Board at 3 p.m. Nov. 9.

Commissioner Stamper said his understanding is that the request is for an additional amount of up to \$200,000. He said reducing the lease costs would help. He said he would like to sit down with his fellow commissioners as well as the Budget department to see what steps could be taken.

John Panesko left at 1:17 p.m.

Commissioner Fund said she'd like a breakdown of what needs to be paid when.

Jerry Pratt resigned from the Lewis County Seniors Board.

Jim Henderson said it sounds like the BOCC is trying to ask for numbers the Seniors Board doesn't have and that it sounds like the BOCC is trying to micromanage the efforts. He said there is no room for negotiation.

Commissioner Fund said the BOCC is trying to find a way to meet legal and auditing requirements.

Michelle Whitten said the large bulk of expenses will fall in the first three months. She said the first three months' costs would total \$240,000. She said the group is trying to reach out to more of the county's poor and infirm.

Don said he would ask the Seniors Board to give the county another day to review.

Fred Rider said if he doesn't have an answer by 6 p.m. Nov. 9, he plans to walk away.

The Seniors Board approved a motion to meet with the BOCC at 3 p.m. Nov. 9.

Toledo High School seniors Samm Zion and Jessica Randall discussed the roles the senior centers play.

Allen Trafton discussed the number of veterans who visit the senior centers.

Anne Marie Dillon discussed the help the senior centers provide.

Julie McDonald Zander asked what has changed since the 1980s regarding supporting only the poor and infirm. Glenn said the issue has been raised for decades.

Jan Kramer asked why the State Auditor's Office (SAO) didn't call the county out for the gifting of public funds during its recent audit of the county. Becky clarified that the SAO merely audits a sampling of the county's finances during its audits.

Carol Brock discussed and RCW regarding parks and rec that she said could help regarding senior centers.

Elizabeth Hicker discussed her research regarding senior centers. She said she found that Tacoma has two senior centers that it supports. She discussed the failing infrastructures at the Lewis County senior center buildings. She said Lewis County is not championing for state and federal funding. She urged the county to tap into the seniors' strengths to take on tasks, such as Discover Lewis County.

Commissioner Fund commended Winlock's use of Facebook to reach out to the public.

Sharon White of Toledo asked if taxes could be used to fund the senior centers.

Commissioner Stamper discussed the desire to get all communities involved and to get more volunteer participation.

Meeting ended at 1:48 p.m.