

## **Legislative Roundtable**

**December 14, 2022**

**12:30 p.m.**

Present: Commissioner Pollock, Commissioner Swope, Commissioner Brummer, County Manager Erik Martin, Rep. Joel McEntire, Sen. John Braun, Rep. Jim Walsh, Rep. Peter Abbarno, Sen. Jeff Wilson, Rep. Ed Orcutt, Josh Weiss of Gordon Thomas Honeywell, Troy Nichols of Phillips Burgess Government Relations, Port Commissioner Peter Lahmann, Chehalis Mayor Tony Ketchum, Eric Eisenberg, Richard DeBolt, Chehalis City Manager Jill Anderson, Josh Metcalf, Pe Ell Mayor Lonnie Willey, Doug Carey, Lee Napier, Mindy Brooks, Kevin Carns, Kate McDougall, Meja Handlen, Eric Eisenberg, Becky Butler, Josh Metcalf, Undersheriff, Sheriff Snaza, Jami Lund, John Anderson, Internal Services Chief Steve Wohld

Guest(s): Isabel Vander Stoep, Jared Wenzelburger

Recorder: Rieva Lester

Public comment: None.

County Manager Erik Martin, Housing & Infrastructure Specialist Eric Eisenberg, lobbyists Josh Weiss of GTH and Troy Nichols of PBGR and others discussed the county's "Legislative Agenda" for 2023.

### **Improve Energy Efficiency of Key County Buildings**

Erik said the county has worked with a third party to identify upgrades to two public buildings that will improve their energy efficiency and assist in meeting the state's carbon reduction goals. The County is investing \$5 million to replace the HVAC system in the jail. The County requests \$2.75 million in capital funding to replace the roofs on the jail and a facility used as a homeless shelter.

The group discussed:

- The ways in which the county's request could fit within the capital budget
- Grant funding available
- Letters of support the lawmakers could provide for grant applications
- Grants for which the county is applying
- What the cost per square foot for the homeless shelter will be
- The estimated cost of the jail roof

Commissioner Swope noted that TransAlta grants for the next couple years already have been allocated.

Meja Handlen said the county is avoiding funding that has strings attached that would take away local control.

## **Senior Services**

Erik said the county needs both operating and capital dollars to care for the county's vulnerable seniors. In order to increase local funding for senior programs, he said, the county is requesting a new credit against the state sales tax that would be dedicated to senior services in small, rural counties. He said the county also is requesting \$2 million from the state's capital budget to make improvements to the county buildings used by the nonprofit organizations who provide senior services.

The group discussed what the total amount of the credit would be, as that would be used to set the rate for the credit.

## **Water Bank**

Erik said the County is in the process of establishing a water bank for a variety of uses and is applying for a grant from the \$14 million provided to the Department of Ecology in the 2022 supplemental capital budget for county water banks. Whether from this grant or other state revenues, he said, the county requires operating resources for consulting costs to establish and initially operate the bank, as well as capital resources to acquire water rights and have Ecology process them.

The group discussed the need to work with the cities regarding water rights.

## **Dig Once**

Erik said the county and the Economic Alliance of Lewis County have helped develop a pilot dig once project. Lewis County supports the Department of Commerce request of \$10 million to implement the pilot.

The group discussed the financial benefits of working on projects simultaneously, especially considering the costs associated with culvert replacements.

Josh Metcalf also discussed the non-monetary benefits the Dig Once proposal offers. He said constituents would appreciate packaged projects that would limit construction time in addition to construction costs.

The lawmakers praised the county's "2023 Legislative Agenda."

Sen. Braun noted that the county's request tops \$15 million and that the Office of the Chehalis Basin has requested roughly \$83 million. Rep. Abbarno discussed the capital budgeting process. Rep. Orcutt said he'd like to further discuss the idea of the sales tax credit to help the area's senior citizens. Rep. Walsh noted that recent redistricting increased the amount of land that's in the 19th District. He urged the county to continue using the capital budget as its last resort, noting that the county should look for grant funding first. Rep. McEntire echoed his colleagues' comments. He encouraged the county to continue to voice its requests so lawmakers know what the county sees as its priorities. Sen. Wilson applauded the commissioners for their work on Dig Once and water banking. He encouraged the commissioners to come to Olympia and to notify the legislators of projects or other matters of importance to the county.

Eric Eisenberg said the county can help mold its processes into processes that would work statewide.

The lawmakers encouraged the commissioners to reach out to like-minded counties to combine their voices on common issues.

Commissioner Swope said Dig Once and homelessness are among his top focuses. Commissioner Swope said he feels Commerce dictates too much. He said the “Build for Zero” mindset works much better than the “Housing First” mindset currently prevalent in Commerce.

Sen. Braun said the Legislature needs to tell Commerce to not to restrict its funds.

Commissioner Pollock urged the lawmakers to focus on and return local control. She also discussed the Growth Management Act and its adverse effects on water quality. She also discussed the benefits of rural water systems serving rural housing needs.

Commissioner Brummer said he feels every level of government is designed to work for the betterment of the community. He discussed the need for a unified voice.

Meeting adjourned at 1:55 p.m.