

Legislative Roundtable

September 23, 2024

3:02 p.m.

Present: Commissioner Brummer, Commissioner Pollock, Commissioner Swope, Sen. John Braun, Rep. Ed Orcutt, Rep. Peter Abbarno, Sen. Jeff Wilson, Rep. Jim Walsh, Josh Weiss, Troy Nichols, Josh Metcalf, Doug Carey, Randy Sasser, Stacy Denham, Shad Hail, Tim Wood, Tom Stanton, John Anderson, Alex Murray, BJ Kuykendall, Todd Chaput, Mindy Brooks, Stephen Dunk, Jeff Johnson, Meja Handlen, Sarah Kohout

Guest(s): Mitchell Roland, Chronicle photographer

Recorder: Rieva Lester

Public comment: None.

Transportation: Public Works Director Josh Metcalf provided updates on the county's Reynolds Road / Harrison Avenue project. He said the right of way phase and intersection analyses have begun. Josh said the county is working with the railroad to address the Blakeslee Junction switch upgrades. He noted that design work is roughly 30 percent to 60 percent complete. Josh noted that the first phase of the West Connector is being designed and that construction is expected to begin in 2026.

Josh said the county needs \$30 million to \$40 million for construction for the Reynolds Road / Harrison Avenue project as well as funding for bridge crossings. He said the county has paid \$450,000 for design work to repair the Ceres Hill Road Bridge and that \$4 million is needed for repairs. He said the county also needs funding for maintenance and repairs of county roads and bridges.

In response to a question from Rep. Peter Abbarno, Josh said the county cannot address issues along the Interstate 5 corridor until the state makes fixing the corridor a priority.

Commissioner Brummer clarified that the SEPA permits for the Winlock and Napavine exits do not come to the county because the areas are within city limits.

Mossyrock Mayor Randy Sasser expressed concerns about the number of log trucks using Mossyrock's city roads.

Equestrian center: Commissioner Brummer and BJ Kuykendall thanked the legislators for their efforts to secure funding for design and requested additional funding to complete construction of the project.

Packwood Sewer project: Josh Metcalf said staff has located a third proposed location for the Packwood Sewer project after the state did not support its first two proposed sites. Josh said the treatment center would be an expandable system. Josh said the project will be ready for construction in 2025 if funding is secured.

Rep. Abbarno recommended the county explore the use of loans or grants.

Elevator modernization: Doug Carey said the county recently learned of changes to code and now faces \$1.4 million in charges to upgrade the county's eight elevators to meet the new requirements.

Rep. Abbarno encouraged the county to apply for funding using one application and to identify within the application the building in which each elevator is housed as there are different pots of money that may be available.

Museum roof replacement: Alex Murray said the roof is failing and that brick restoration also is needed to mitigate ongoing water entry.

Rep. Abbarno recommended the county have the railroad submit grant applications since it owns the building.

Troy Nichols said he can help with the elevator applications.

Josh Weiss said the county also is extremely interested in caseload limits and water system receiverships and, though Lewis County won't lead the discussion, the county is ready to help with discussions.

Other: Sen. Jeff Wilson discussed the need to require that wraparound services to go hand-in-hand with homeless services.

Rep. Jim Walsh urged the county to ensure it reaches out with budget requests early – by November – so the lawmakers can review line items that may fit instead of seeking LCB funding.

Sen. John Braun urged caution about transportation funding requests due to current conditions, including gas prices. He urged the county to spend its broadband money quickly and wisely to ensure more funding comes to the county.

The commissioners said there are regulatory and resource issues regarding water system receiverships, noting that the Department of Health needs to provide regulatory relief for water system receiverships. Commissioner Pollock said the lack of operators has compounded the problem.

Mossyrock Mayor Randy Sasser asked for updates regarding the Mossyrock dam.

Treasurer Arny Davis said the county should not be fiscally responsible for area schools should they fail. Sen. John Braun and Rep. Peter Abbarno said the state would be required to step in, not the county.

Mitchell Roland asked if the upcoming gubernatorial changes will affect Office of the Chehalis Basin funding. Sen Braun said he is optimistic that funding will not be jeopardized.

County Manager Stacy Denham expressed concerns regarding Green Hill.

Todd Chaput encouraged work to fund the Napavine exchange and the Chehalis bridge.

Commissioner Pollock expressed concerns regarding proposed caseload limits.

Meeting adjourned at 4:12 p.m.