

Legislative Roundtable

November 1, 2019

9 a.m.

Present: Commissioner Fund, Commissioner Jackson, Commissioner Stamper, County Manager Erik Martin, Sen. Dean Takko, Rep. Brian Blake, Rep. Jim Walsh, Rep. Ed Orcutt, Legislative Assistant Ruth Peterson of Sen. John Braun's office, Centralia Mayor Lee Coumbs, Chehalis Mayor Dennis Dawes, Morton Mayor Dan Mortensen, Mossyrock Mayor Randy Sasser, Napavine City Councilwoman LaVerne Haslett, Pe Ell Mayor Lonnie Willey, Toledo Clerk Michelle ****Whitman***, Vader Mayor Lois Wilson, Winlock Mayor Don Bradshaw, American Forest Resource Council State Manager Matt Comisky, Washington State Association of Counties Executive Director Eric Johnson, Lewis County Sheriff Rob Snaza, Southwest Washington Fair Manager Tamara Hayes, marketing consultant Mary Kay Nelson, Southwest Grain Project Manager Mike Peroni, Lewis County Economic Development Council (EDC) Executive Director Matt Matayoshi, Lewis County Clerk Scott Tinney, Lewis County PUD Manager Chris Roden

Guests: Numerous county employees and various members of the public and press

Recorder: Rieva Lester

Participants introduced themselves.

Commissioner Fund *** flooding.

Commission Fund * Braun.**

TO-DO LIST / RECAP

BOCC: Provide Rep. Blake with a list of unfunded mandates

Timber harvests and forests

American Forest Resource Council State Manager Matt Comisky discussed concerns regarding timber harvests and harvests. He said DNR has seen a downturn that is affecting counties, especially in response to restrictions linked to the marbled murrelet.

Rep. Ed Orcutt said management of the Alliance is being reviewed. He said state lawmakers have been pushing for better forest management. Rep. Orcutt acknowledged the importance of timber resources.

Rep. Brian Blake discussed his efforts to help resolve issues surrounding the marbled murrelet. He said he feels the federal Endangered Species Act has been "weaponized" and is being used inappropriately.

Commissioner Stamper discussed a study that concluded that lands being set aside for marbled murrelets include stands not appropriate for the species. He asked if other studies are being reviewed.

Sen. Dean Takko said he feels the opinions from rural areas are in the minority. He noted that both sides claim to have "the best available science."

Rep. Jim Walsh said DNR's habitat plan for the marbled murrelet is unacceptable. He urged the audience to reach out to their representatives to fight the proposed regulations, noting that it's a lose-lose, "wasteful" exercise. He said the public needs to pressure state legislators to keep the DNR from choosing the "wrong" plan.

Sen. Takko noted that every email from angry mayors is matched by 1,000 emails from environmentalists.

Rep. Blake said he would have chosen Option B.

Sen. Takko discussed work in Wahkiakum County to possibly buy out the state lands.

Commissioner Stamper recapped the county's recent meeting with the DNR, during which the DNR gave bleak projections for future harvests.

Matt Comisky said the Good Neighbor Authority has been successful.

Rep. Orcutt said angry emails should be directed the commissioner of public lands and CC'd to area representatives.

Unfunded mandates

Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC) Executive Director Eric Johnson discussed the unnecessary hardships unfunded mandates put on cities and counties. Among the unfunded mandates hurting communities, he said, are ballot boxes. He urged lawmakers to consider funding sources whenever new policies are adopted.

Rep. Blake asked for a list of unfunded mandates causing hardship.

Rep. Walsh expressed dismay at the state's habit of creating policies in response to lawsuits rather than taking a proactive approach to topics that need to be addressed.

Delays at state toxicology labs and state training facilities

Sheriff Rob Snaza discussed delays at the state toxicology labs in response to a lack of funding. He said the average wait time on toxicology reports for DUIs is eight to nine months. He said the backlog is affecting the county's cases. He noted that toxicology labs continue to request additional funding but that those please go unanswered.

Sheriff Snaza thanked the state for additional training opportunities, however he expressed concern about the length of time the training process works.

LEOFF and PERS

Chehalis Mayor Dennis Dawes thanked state lawmakers for helping pass legislation related to LEOFF. Mayor Dawes pleaded that the state not lay all of the responsibility on the cities or counties. He also urged state lawmakers to not merge pension systems.

Chehalis Mayor Lee Coumbs said LEOFF 1 payments are falling squarely on the small cities.

Mayor Dawes said he's not asking for more funding, just to have the state maintain its level of contribution.

Fish passages

County Manager Erik Martin said Lewis County has more than 500 culverts on county roads alone. He said replacing all of them would be \$860,000 apiece, for a total of \$430 million.

Erik said a few years ago, the projects cost a fraction of the price. He said overregulation, such as "pebble counts," are driving the costs up. He urged lawmakers to look at what is driving up the costs.

Rep. Orcutt agreed that the replacement process should be streamlined. He said he will speak with Fish and Wildlife about overregulation, noting that it would be much more beneficial to replace three culverts for the same price it would cost to replace one. Rep. Orcutt said part of his concerns focuses on the small land owners who also face the regulatory requirements.

Eric Johnson said the average cost statewide for a county to replace a culvert is \$1.25 million. He said the topic is one of the unfunded mandates WSAC is focusing on.

Rep. Walsh said he agrees that the culverts need to be replaced, but he said the state needs to take a proactive, common-sense approach to permits, etc. Rep. Blake agreed about the need for a proactive approach.

Outdoor recreation

Mary Kay Nelson discussed the role outdoor recreation and tourism plays in the economy.

She said she would love to see the proposed State Route 504 and Highway 12 loop become a reality and she'd love to see the area develop more trails in the county.

Southwest Washington Fair Manager Tamara Hayes discussed efforts to create a public-private push for outdoor recreation. She said she would like to seek funding for an outdoor recreation plan. Tamara also thanked the Legislature for the Department of Commerce grant the fair received.

Sen. Takko discussed statewide tourism marketing, noting that Washington spends no money toward statewide tourism marketing. He discussed the creation of a tourism alliance.

Southwest Grain Project

Southwest Grain Project Manager Mike Peroni introduced Port of Chehalis *** Randy Mueller and Commissioner Marc Giffey**** and Dave Fenn.

Randy Mueller discussed .09 Distressed Counties funding used to create a rail spur at the port for the project.

Marc Giffey* discussed the importance of agricultural economy.

Dave Fenn* discussed the need for profitable crops in Southwest Washington and asked that the state support the creation of the grain terminal.

Mike Peroni said he has a letter of understanding from 30 various entities that support the project. Mike said the grain terminal started as a grass-roots project. Mike noted that a number of studies are planned or underway.

Sen. Takko noted that a \$1 million ask is pretty large considering there is only \$70 million available.

Rep. Walsh suggested the group wait 18 months to submit its request.

Rep. Orcutt said the group should go ahead and submit its request now. Sen. Takko agreed.

Transportation

County Manager Erik Martin discussed the North Lewis County Industrial Access project and thanked lawmakers for their support on the project. Erik said the county has applied for a \$500,000 Build Grant and has been awarded .09 Distressed Counties funding for the project.

Erik also discussed work on the Rush Road interchange. He said meetings are planned to help identify how to best use the state's \$1 million.

Commissioner Jackson discussed congestion in the area and potential solutions being reviewed.

Washington State Department of Transportation **** Wes Anderson discussed what can be done with the funding available.

Wes said the stakeholder group needs to identify low-cost alternatives that will provide immediate relief as well as longer-term fixes.

Commissioner Fund stressed the importance of the North Lewis County Industrial Access project to ease traffic concerns now and in the future.

At 10:25 a.m., Commissioner Jackson announced a 15-minute break.

The meeting resumed at 10:42 a.m.

Water-sewer improvements

Lewis County Economic Development Council (EDC) Executive Director Matt Matayoshi thanked the state for funding for the Packwood study; however, he noted there has been a delay releasing the funds. Matt discussed improvements taking place regarding Winlock's water line, which has been extended to the Interstate 5 corridor and will serve the Winlock industrial park. Matt said the last piece of the puzzle is the need for a sewer line.

Toledo Clerk Michelle Whitman thanked the state for supporting Toledo's *****.

Erik Martin said the county has a tentative agreement with TCOMM regarding a joint study about 911 regionalization. Erik said there may be a future ask to the state regarding possible funding.

Eric Johnson said areas such as Packwood shouldn't have to undergo the urban growth area analysis.

Collecting legal financial obligations (LFOs)

Lewis County Clerk Scott Tinney said the county's hands have been tied regarding fees that used to be assessed to criminals. He said "indigency" has been redefined to *****, meaning the county has to pay the associated fees. He said the county has to use money it would use toward wages, etc., to cover those costs. Noting it's the third year in a row he has addressed the same topic to the Legislators.

Sheriff Rob Snaza said the courts no longer can impose fees. He said the daily jail population used to hover around 185 and now hovers around 250. He said those incarcerated individuals often have medical problems that must be addressed using taxpayer dollars. He said there's no end in sight for the unfunded mandates. He cited mental health care costs at the jail. He said medical coverage alone costs the county \$1 million.

Commissioner Jackson discussed the ripple effect of unpaid fines. He said most of the fees collected go straight to the state.

Rep. Walsh railed against the changes to LFOs. He said law and order and accountability need to be restored across the state.

Sen. Takko discussed individuals who choose not to purchase insurance. He said some merely choose not to purchase it because their properties are not worth the investment.

Commissioner Jackson said he recently sat on the bench with a judge. He said the individuals would pay only the amount necessary to get their license back. He said LFOs are supposed to be a deterrent. He said counties must be allowed to collect the LFOs.

Sheriff Snaza discussed recent legislation that would have decriminalized suspended drivers. He said judges understand that some individuals cannot pay and set the fines accordingly. He said the state is taking away municipalities' ability to hold individuals accountable.

Commissioner Stamper said the fees give the courts a way to hold criminals accountable.

Mayor Dawes echoed those sentiments. He said state lawmakers are making constituents responsible for individuals who are not held responsible for their own actions.

Rep. Walsh said taking away accountability encourages bad behavior.

Mayor Randy Sasser said the topic affects cities' budgets, too. He said individuals get insurance because it's the law, not to protect their properties.

Sheriff Snaza discussed the financial impacts cases can have on small cities.

Rep. Orcutt said he too sat on the bench with a judge. He said the individuals would pay only the amount necessary to get their license back. He said it didn't change the individuals' behavior because the individuals were not being held accountable.

Commissioner Stamper left at 11:19 a.m.

Broadband technology

Lewis County PUD Manager Chris Roden thanked the lawmakers for their accessibility.

Chris discussed the devastating wildfires taking place in California.

Chris discussed the county's lack of broadband technology. He urged the state to provide funding for telecommunications infrastructure. He asked for

Sen. Takko said the state earmarked \$25 million for broadband, which is just a drop in the bucket statewide. He said he is frustrated that CERB, Public Works and the governor's office have presented a fractured approach to broadband.

Erik Martin echoed those sentiments, indicating that there needs to be a consolidated approach. He also noted that the \$25 million took funding away from other essential utilities Public Works projects.

Chris Roden discussed the need for broadband technology. He discussed the PUD's application for a CERB grant.

Eric Johnson urged groups to use the Test It app to measure the strength of internet connectivity.

Rep. Walsh said there's a political will to fund the effort. He said the problem lies in the fact that if the group focuses on rural broadband, other rural needs can go unmet.

Commissioner Fund noted that Pierce County was allowed to how ****

Mayors' roundtable

Pe Ell Mayor Lonnie Willey thanked the lawmakers for attending. He discussed grants for which the town has applied.

Winlock Mayor Don Bradshaw said 68 homes have been sold and 50 have been built year to date in Winlock. Mayor Bradshaw thanked the state for funding for water and street projects. He also discussed efforts to extend sewer service. He also urged small cities to add conduit for broadband every time ditch work takes place. Mayor Bradshaw thanked Erik Martin for his work on 911.

Mossyrock Mayor Randy Sasser said the city is awaiting a grant for lighting. He said the city also has applied for an Ecology grant for wastewater work. He said the city also is working on a rate study for

water and sewer services. Mayor Sasser invited the group to upcoming social events, including movies in the park and a Christmas tree-lighting event.

Centralia Mayor Lee Coumbs said the Borst Avenue project is wrapping up. He said the city is interested in work on the future of 911. He discussed the benefits of regionalization. Mayor Coumbs discussed water rights issues the city faces. He discussed the need to protect the underground aquifer.

Sen. Takko left at 11:45 a.m.

Toledo City Clerk Michelle Whitten discussed the city's success with broadband and water-sewer infrastructure. She discussed upcoming social events, including a Veterans Day event and the New Year's Eve "Cheese Drop."

Erik said Toledo was highlighted as a success story during a recent Broadband 101 workshop.

Chehalis Mayor Dennis Dawes discussed work to revamp Recreation Park. He discussed the benefits 911 regionalization would provide. He discussed the need for a water retention facility – and the need to fund it. Mayor Dawes discussed needs to replace the city's railroad bridge, which has a cost estimate of \$35 million. He also talked about revitalization projects taking place in the downtown area.

Vader Mayor Lois Wilson discussed help Rep. Richard DeBolt provided to assist the city in securing funding for restrooms. She said the city now needs help to pay for wastewater improvements the Department of Ecology is requiring.

Napavine City Councilwoman LaVerne Haslett said the area residents appreciate the state lawmakers' support. She thanked WSDOT and Commissioner Jackson for their help with the Rush Road interchange. She discussed the need for regulation of existing broadband services.

Public comment

Bob Guenther discussed the need for a foundation of industrial technology skills training.

Frank Corbin discussed the need for broadband technology.

Peter Lahmann asked state lawmakers to ease the restrictions of the Open Public Meetings Act. Peter invited the group to upcoming social events.

Commissioner Fund noted that the county will become a Purple Heart County. She also invited the audience to the Dec. 6 Mayors' Meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 12:09 p.m.