

Levies and Budget

December 2, 2024

10 a.m.

Present: Commissioner Brummer, Commissioner Pollock, Commissioner Swope, County Manager Ryan Barrett, Becky Butler, Erika Katt, Ross McDowell, Sheriff Rob Snaza, Undersheriff Kevin Engelbertson, Crime Services Chief Rick VanWyck, Josh Metcalf, Marylynne Kostick, Mindy Brooks, Rudy Rodriguez, Doug Carey, Graham Gowing, Sherri Dokken

Guest(s): Bob Bozarth, Frank Corbin, Elizabeth Cameron, Mitchell Townsend, Paul Crowner, Dave Germain, several unnamed guests

Recorder: Rieva Lester

Public comment:

Frank Corbin shared concerns quotes attributed to the commissioners in a recent Chronicle article about the county budget and the recently passed 911 tax.

Elizabeth Cameron also shared concerns regarding the recent Chronicle article and outlined the proper use of the funds from the approved tax.

Dave Germain shared concerns about the lack of vocal support from electeds and the local Republican party regarding the 911 tax.

Commissioner Brummer clarified that the newspaper had quoted him addressing how the county could use the savings the Sheriff's Office would see from the 911 tax should it pass. He also noted that by indicating they supported the tax, the commissioners were talking about their support out in the public, not necessarily their work with the local political action committee (PAC).

Sheriff Rob Snaza clarified that he too supported the 911 tax while speaking with the public.

DELIBERATION ITEM

Resolution 24-436: Certify the property tax levies for junior taxing districts for collection in 2025.

Clerk of the Board Rieva Lester discussed the resolution, noting that junior taxing districts are required by state law to submit their levy amounts to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) and that the BOCC must certify the amounts to the Assessor's Office. She said the resolution and attachment fulfill the requirements.

Commissioner Pollock made a motion to approve Resolution 24-436. Commissioner Swope seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

HEARINGS

Resolution 24-437: Adopt the annual budget of Lewis County for the calendar year of 2025.

Commissioner Brummer introduced the hearing.

County Manager Ryan Barrett and Budget Administrator Becky Butler gave the staff report.

Ryan noted that the BOCC held individual budget meetings, all open to the public, with elected officials and department directors to discuss proposed budget reductions and that the day's hearing was proceeded by several work sessions, including an evening presentation to the public on Nov. 13.

Ryan noted that the revenue total for all funds is budgeted at \$190,699,983 and expenditures are budgeted at \$193,810,836. He said the budget reflects a \$3.1 million use of revenue received in prior years (Fund Balance) and that the budget includes \$13 million for the Winlock Broadband Project, funded by State American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, and \$2.5 million for county ARPA projects.

Ryan said the final budget sets the General Fund (Current Expense) revenue at \$47,597,335 and expenditures at \$47,485,517. The budget for the General Fund shows a surplus of \$111,818. He noted that the estimated beginning Fund balance includes the transfer of lost revenue of approximately \$2 million as allowed under ARPA.

Becky Butler noted the following:

- Radio Fund 5200 budget consolidated with Communications Budget Fund 1070
- Self-Insurance Administration Dept 012 consolidated with Risk Management Funds 5100 and 5120 as part of the county's cost-allocation plan (CAP).
- The General Fund Balance Change was primarily due to the adoption of the CAP, which resulted in reduced expenditures totaling \$2.3 million. Other changes included the addition of final property tax calculations – ending with a surplus of a little over \$100,000.
- The largest change in the bottom-line total county budget was attributed to the changes in the Road Fund Budget as the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) was finalized.
- The budget does not include any increase for public defense costs associated with proposed changes to the state's caseload standards.
- The budget includes approximately \$1 million in Opioid Settlement funds for the Sheriff Enforcement Team, the Youth Advocacy Center (YAC), Narcan supplies for law enforcement, and substance-use disorder treatment and medications in the Jail through the county's Naphcare contract.

In response to a question from Commissioner Swope, Becky said roughly 20 positions were cut to balance the budget for 2025. She noted that staffing levels are now lower than in 2008.

Commissioner Brummer asked if there were any questions. There were no questions.

Commissioner Brummer then closed the question-and-answer portion of the hearing.

Ryan and Becky asked that their previous comments be adopted into the record.

Commissioner Brummer asked if anyone wanted to speak for or against the resolution. No one spoke.

Commissioner Brummer closed the hearing.

Commissioner Pollock made a motion to approve Resolution 24-437. Commissioner Swope seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

Resolution 24-438: Property tax budgets and levies for Current Expense and Roads.

Commissioner Brummer introduced the hearing.

County Manager Ryan Barrett gave the staff report. He noted that the resolution increases the General property tax levy by 2.98 percent – or \$458,506.98 – over the previous year. He said the resolution also increases the Road property tax levy by 2.77 percent – or \$398,046 – over the previous year.

Commissioner Brummer asked if there were any questions.

In response to a question from Commissioner Pollock, Budget Administrator noted that the county reimburses roughly \$1.4 million from Roads to the Sheriff's Office.

In response to a question from a member of the public, Becky Butler explained the use of banked capacity, and the commissioners noted that businesses pay both property taxes and personal property taxes.

In response to a question from a member of the public, Becky noted that junior taxing districts all set their own levy rates.

In response to a question from a member of the public, Becky Butler again explained the use of banked capacity, and she and Ryan discussed budget cuts the county has made over the past two years in an effort to reduce expenditures.

Commissioner Brummer closed the question-and-answer portion of the hearing.

Ryan and Becky asked that their previous comments be adopted into the record.

Commissioner Brummer asked if anyone wanted to speak for or against the resolution.

Commissioner Swope reviewed the county's Strategic Plan and Long-Range Strategic Plan, and he addressed staffing levels at the Lewis County Sheriff's Office, noting that the county operates below the state's average staffing levels. Commissioner Swope said he is voting in favor of the resolution to ensure public safety receives full funding.

Commissioner Pollock said discussions about proposed cuts to the Sheriff's Office centered on vacant positions. She said the Sheriff's Office has suffered staffing losses due to its culture. She noted that the Sheriff's Office has six employees who are on the Brady List and therefore cannot testify. Commissioner Pollock said voters could be asked to decide whether they would like to fund public safety through property taxes or to move to a public safety tax instead.

Commissioner Swope noted that the county loses deputies to surrounding governmental entities that have higher starting pay. He noted that Commissioner Pollock had issued a complaint about one of the county's deputies. Commissioner Pollock responded that she had not issued such a complaint.

Commissioner Brummer noted that the Sheriff's Office is a separate office. He also discussed increased costs to the county, such as skyrocketing fuel costs, and noted that the proposed increase does not keep pace with inflation.

Commissioner Brummer closed the hearing.

Commissioner Pollock made a motion to approve Resolution 24-438. Commissioner Swope seconded. Motion passed 3-0.

Meeting adjourned at 11 a.m.