



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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STATE OF THE COUNTY 2024

The mission of 2023 was efficiency in the face of adversity. As we started the year, you may remember that the Commissioners set goals and got to work implementing them right away. Those goals are Economic Development, Infrastructure, Public Trust, Financial Stability, and Quality of Life. I'm going to tell you about some of the things that we have accomplished for each goal, but you might notice that a lot of these things aren't just checking the box for one goal – they really support each other and speak to a collective strategy to improve life here in Curry County.

First, we have some good news on the Economic Development front. The County's tourism and local economy services are fueled with a small portion of the funds we bring in from the Transient Lodging Tax. Among other things, that money allows the Economic Development Department to assist in the creation of new jobs, support local enterprises and introduce new initiatives to enhance economic stability for all of our residents and visitors alike.

One of the wins we have had this year is a grant from Travel Oregon that will allow us to bring a beach wheelchair rental program called Wheel the World to our local beaches, starting right here in Gold Beach. Everyone should have the ability to enjoy our beautiful coastline, and this is just one way to make it more accessible. That said, Economic Development doesn't reach its full potential unless we can drive opportunities for the workforce, and the biggest priority there is increasing the availability of housing. I've seen so many people who really have a passion for this area leave because they just aren't able to find a place to live long term, and that applies to both new-comers and natives. The County just recently got the good news that Oregon has set aside five hundred million dollars to back local housing projects. We have the chance to offer up a few projects of our choosing and get those funded. The Board's priority is not only creating economic opportunities, but also allowing housing and other infrastructure projects to move forward.

I don't know about you, but when I think of infrastructure I picture housing, community resources, and transportation. But it's more than that. Before I talk more about this, I need to reiterate

something very important - this Board of Commissioners does not support windmills and will adamantly oppose their introduction to our ocean.

A huge leap for County infrastructure this year was the finalization of the transfer of State grant funding from the County to the Rogue-Siskiyou Regional Fire Training Center. Once completed, this facility will not only provide robust training opportunities to local, regional, and statewide first responders, but will also provide a firearms range accessible to the public. We are excited to see the ways that the Center benefits our local communities, and it certainly will enhance our response to wildfire season.

On April 26th of 2023, the County was the victim of a cyber-attack that in some way shape or form affected all county services. This affected every elected official, department head, staff and our citizens, but it also provided an opportunity to band together and resolve the issues. Not only did we grow stronger as a group, but this time of vulnerability gave us the chance to ask for help.

The assistance provided to us at a moment's notice by other counties, state agencies, nonprofits, and local municipalities was incredible. People we had never met or spoken to before were here working side by side with County staff to get us through it and restore services to our citizens. It was through these relationships that we were able to find strong, long-term solutions to problems that have plagued the county for years. Although the hack devastated our ability to provide essential services for some time, it allowed us an opportunity to grow and become stronger and ultimately more efficient. Our IT infrastructure is now more secure and faster than ever, our IT policy is current, and the transition to a .gov domain is planned in the near future. I believe that true character is revealed in adversity and am proud to say that our character is strong.

A huge unforeseen advantage that came out of all that was being able to develop a long-term relationship with the Lane Council of Governments (you might hear us call them "LCOG") and let me tell you, that has been invaluable. They still are a crucial facet of the County IT Department, and it turns out that our partnership doesn't just stop there.

A capable, qualified, and knowledgeable Finance Director is exactly what is needed to renew Financial Stability as we move through this fiscal year and begin preparing for the next. At this meeting, we will vote on the hire of Keina Wolf, who left her position as the Finance Director of LCOG in order to accept this position at the County.

Last budget season, we immediately recognized that the true state of County finances was unknown - the most concerning problem was that our accounts had not been reconciled for the previous two fiscal years for a variety of reasons I won't get in to right now. The emphasis here is not on making excuses for past leadership and what could have been done better, but on the present and what we can do now to fix it. Excuses are lies.

This year, our budget committee was faced with approving a budget that was balanced using a combination of educated estimates and one-time money.

This year, our Department Heads have made it work with a careful combination of discipline, double-checking and a bit of luck.

This year, staff have been hard at work reconciling the books to ensure that our finances will be accurate going into the 2024/2025 budget season.

Next year that won't be the case and I can speak for all of us in saying that is a huge relief. For a few years, we have been aware that the County is expecting a financial crisis. We now know that will be a reality in the spring of 2024.

Two financial cliffs loom in our future, the general fund deficit and the rapidly depleting road funds. We were able to address the Road Fund issue early in the year by redirecting priorities and reorganizing the process of equipment purchases and use. Throughout that process, approximately \$5,000,000.00 was saved. Almost a quarter of those savings are attributed to a fundamental shift in the way that fleet vehicles are purchased. Instead of new vehicles being bought every couple of years, there's a new emphasis on the maintenance and longevity of our existing vehicles. The Road Department is here to maintain the County Roads and they are doing a great job, especially during the recent weather events.

Additionally, we've looked at how other departments are run, and have been able to purge much of the duplication and redundancies we saw in day-to-day procedures. This time last year, the County had 139 employees and today, we have 124. Part of getting our financial house in order was the elimination of different admin positions at the advice and direction of an outside efficiency expert, which adds up to about \$800,000.00 in salaries and benefits being saved.

The reason I am sharing these things with you today is not just because I feel it is my duty to keep you informed. It's also in an effort to make sure you know what we are dealing with and to ask for your help. In other words, community participation and input on important topics is a driving factor on how we, as your County representatives, advocate for you.

That ties into Public Trust, because the way I see it, trust goes both ways, and it starts with us. Because of your input, we have changed meeting times to accommodate working people and have begun holding meetings and workshops in both North and South County on a regular basis.

The strength of our community lies in active community participation on key issues, and that in turn ensures that the voices of all our citizens are heard and valued, shaping the future of Curry County.

A great example of this is the recent Airport Road logging site in North County. As I mentioned before, we can't change the decisions made in the past but we can listen to the people and use that input to shape the decisions we make moving forward. We got some really great input from North County about how they want to see that land used in the future, and I truly appreciate each and every person who came to tell us their ideas on the land's best and highest use to benefit not only the County, but the residents in years to come.

Making improvements requires change, and even though everyone will admit to wanting to improve, the changes required to make that happen are not often met with the same enthusiasm. Making these changes is not difficult, it is the resistance to the change that creates difficulties.

That brings us to Quality of Life, the foundation of which is safety. This past year, we had quite a few disasters. The loss of Highway 101 near Arizona Beach heavily impacted travel and shipping, but our Sheriff's Office and Emergency Management team did a great job of getting us back on our feet.

In 2023, we had three major fires all around the same time affecting the County. Forest fires are always on my mind and even though they seem to be a yearly occurrence, they never become any less concerning or damaging to the quality of life here in Curry County.

Although we made it out without damage to any structures, tragically one young fire firefighter, Benjamin Charles Sapper, lost his life. That is a harsh reminder of the dangers that first responders face on a day-to-day basis.

The primary public safety duties rest with the County Sheriff's Office. Currently, the County is able to offset the cost needed to perform patrol services with Road funds. However, current staffing levels do not allow for deputies to be on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Now, I want to tell you what lies ahead. I mentioned the financial deficit but I don't think that we have really described what that means for the County. Because we don't know exactly what the carryover from last year's budget will be, these numbers will be approximate but that does not make them less impactful.

It's been ten years since we have addressed the law enforcement funding issue by taking a survey to hear the opinions of our citizens. Some of you may have been contacted for comment during a recent survey issued by the County to gauge public support for a law enforcement funding solution.

Again, we really want to know what the community thinks. If the citizens want a levy then we will design that levy to meet the specific desires of the community.

This year, four million dollars was transferred from the Road fund to the Sheriff's Office to provide limited services. In the wake of Measure 110, and with the upward trend in violent crime, we know that we need a fully staffed, 24/7 Sheriff's Office. No one wants to use the Road Funds to fill the gap, and we need to take that into consideration when planning for the future. Based on the information available to us right now, if we stop using Road Funds to compensate for Sheriff's patrol, we will need to cut County services across the board by 49%.

If we continue to use Road Funds to offset the deficit in Sheriff's Patrol as has been done in the past, we will be looking at approximately 31% of the County's budget being cut. The cuts won't just be one department or service – they're County-wide and will severely impact our ability to provide even basic services. We must either find a creative manner to handle cuts, or a hefty funding solution. Hope is not a good plan.

This Board of Commissioners must provide you with a funding solution that will enable the County to increase the response time by our Sheriff's Office, provide quality Veterans Services, support a District Attorney's Office that will be able to prosecute all crimes, and maintain a fully staffed County Clerk and Assessor's Office.

So, this Board will present a well thought out solution that will be what the people want. Our solution will follow the law, County policy, and will be what is ethically correct.

Today, I want to announce that the May Primary ballot will include a levy to fund 24/7 deputies for the Curry County Sheriff's Office, to maintain the County jail so they can accommodate arrests made by City Police in Port Orford, Gold Beach, and Brookings, and will ensure that the District Attorney's Office has all the resources it needs to prosecute those criminals.

This levy will have oversight in the form of a group of citizens chosen by leadership to follow through with purpose and intention. This levy will be re-evaluated in five years. This levy will fund the level of service we as citizens of Curry County rely on in the present day, and in consideration of the ever-changing threats to public safety.

In May, we will provide you, the people, the opportunity for change. If you choose to fund our Sheriff's Office, you will see a level of service you have never seen before.

Brad Alcorn
Chair
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