

November 20th, 2023

The Board of Garfield County Commissioners met in regular session on Monday November 20, 2023, at 9:00 a.m. in the Commissioners' Chambers at the Garfield County Courthouse.

Present were Chairman Justin Dixon, Member Larry Ledgerwood, Member Jim Nelson, Clerk of the Board McKenzie Lueck and the public.

The Board started the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Dixon called for public comment but there was none.

Road Supervisor, Steve Gormsen, gave the road report. The report was for the time period of November 6th through November 16th. The graders ran on the following roads: Bell Plain, Falling Springs, Heaton Gulch, Weimer Hill, Columbia Center, Alpowa Creek, Howell Grade, Clayton, Peola, Blind Grade, Bartels, and Linville Ridge. The crew hauled rock to Easy Lynn and Washboard to fix muddy spots. The crew also cleaned culverts on Dutch Flat, Tatman, and Kirby Mayview and worked on vegetation control on Kirby Mayview and Casey Creek. They were able to get the shed moved to the landfill and they started tearing down the radio building at Dodge. Steve is working on getting an electrician out to the landfill to get power hooked up to the shed at which point it will start being used. They are hoping to finish tearing out the radio tower this week, but there might be a need to rent equipment to get the concrete torn out if the equipment they have won't do it. In the shop, they worked on multiple projects; repairs were made on E257 plow and sander, they installed a plow on a truck, they are working on the mag pickup so it's ready for winter, they worked on E222 Traverse as it recently broke down on a work trip, and they looked at E121 grader which had a check engine light on. They are working on sign inventory and installing delineators. This week the crew is still grading and looking for trees and limbs that need trimmed, they are also installing delineators. There was discussion about the increase in price of delineators over the last few years and how that has impacted the on-hand inventory. Steve stated that if the ground thaws out, the crew will start grading. He also informed the Board that they had a new operator start today. Steve gave an update on the guardrail that is damaged on Meadow Creek and Highway 127. He is communicating with the State Road Department about whose responsibility it is to replace it, and at this time it seems the responsibility will be shared about half and half, but it is still a work in progress.

Ashlyn Deatherage joined the Board to give them an updated Computer ERR budget as well as an updated County Road budget with some payroll adjustments included. There was discussion on when the latest budget requests need to be turned in, and Chairman Dixon requested as soon as possible.

Sheriff Hyer joined the Board to request an increase in the 2024 budget for juvenile housing due to increased costs from associated jurisdictions and the amount of juveniles/length of time juveniles are being held for Garfield County. He stated that he had previously budgeted \$3,500 but needed to increase that to \$7,000. The Board agreed to the increase stating that it was out of the Sheriff's control. Sheriff Hyer also requested an increase for deputy and dispatch testing on the 2024 budget. He stated that he previously \$3,500 for this, which pays for doing background

checks and other required testing on dispatch and deputies but needs to increase that to \$7,000 due to how much he is spending this year and believes will have to spend next year. Chairman Dixon asked if Sheriff Hyer could do the testing/background checks in house and Sheriff Hyer stated that they could do them, however, they are time consuming and they do not have the time to do them in house currently due to staffing and workload. Chairman Dixon asked how many positions were currently open and Sheriff Hyer stated that there are two deputy positions currently open, and the Sheriff has two applicants. Sheriff Hyer continued that there are also two full-time dispatch positions open as well as two part-time positions open for dispatch. Commissioner Nelson asked if Sheriff Hyer has had any time to discuss jail contracts with any of the surrounding areas. Chairman Dixon and Sheriff Hyer are going to Walla Walla on the 30th to discuss the potential for a contract for jail services. There was discussion regarding a new regional jail in Walla Walla. Commissioner Ledgerwood stated that Deputy Taylor is doing a good job taking over Search and Rescue and it's a nice change from the last few years.

The Board reviewed a resolution to transfer \$20,000 from Current Expense to Solid Waste Management. This is an annual transfer that takes place for the levy shift. Commissioner Ledgerwood made a motion to approve resolution 2023-20 in the matter of Transfer from Current Expense to Solid Waste Management and Commissioner Nelson seconded the motion. The resolution passed unanimously.

County Treasurer Tereasa Summers joined the Board for a Finance Committee Meeting at 9:30 a.m. Treasurer Summers stated that the current tax collection rate is at almost 98%, and that it is going well and right on target. She informed the Board that their new tax program is working in the background and the transition is going well. Commissioner Ledgerwood asked if the tax collection rates from 2019- 2022 (all of which were over 99%) that were listed in the 3rd Quarter Finance handout were up to this point or for the whole year and Treasurer Summers stated that they were for the whole year. Treasurer Summers stated that she just sent out delinquent reminders so she expects the rate to be right on track for the same collection rate this year. She presented a tax distribution graph that shows where the county's tax dollars go. The majority of the tax monies goes to the following jurisdictions: School O&M (18%), County Road (15%), State School Part 1 (15%), County General (14%), School Bond (10%), and the Fire District (8%). Treasurer Summers also provided a bar graph that showed the tax collection from 2010 through 2023 between the taxpayers and Puget Sound Energy. Chairman Dixon stated that county's tax collection is close to \$2.5-3 million annually from taxpayers and after Puget Sound Energy (PSE) came and the county collections are now between \$5.5 - 6+ million. Treasurer Summers pointed out that the taxes from PSE have gone down recently but that's due to the economy, not a depreciation, and once the economy gets better their taxes will increase again. Treasurer Summers also provided two graphs to show the difference in what the tax collection has been for Current Expense with PSE and if they were not included and the county was just collecting the additional 1% per year. There was discussion regarding the refund the County paid to PSE of \$593,635 in 2012 for their green energy refund tax. There was discussion regarding tax refunds because there are new taxes collected for County Transportation Authority and Emergency Management Sales and Use Taxes, which would both be subject to the 75% green energy tax refund. There was discussion regarding the process of these refunds and if Department of Revenue would hold the money so the county doesn't have to, or we can write a check to the recipients directly after we hold it for the year. Commissioner Nelson asked if we

would be able to make any money on the money while the county holds it prior to the refund and Treasurer Summers stated that the county does have the ability to make money on it. Chairman Dixon agreed that if the county can profit off of it, to hold it. Chairman Dixon stated that this green energy tax refund just applies to new construction. Treasurer Summers stated the hurdle is trying to figure out how much revenue will come in and how much will need to be held back for refunds. She gave a breakdown of month-to-month end balances for all of the funds under the Board's control. Treasurer Summers stated that all of these funds are doing really well and are way up from the beginning of the year. She discussed the investments; the state pool is getting a little over 5% right now, which is up from previous years. She continued that there are two CD's that are going to mature this year so she's looking at two other CD's. She said that she is slowly weeding out the bonds that she had to get in 2020 and replacing those with bonds that have a rate of 4-5%. Commissioner Ledgerwood stated that the information Treasurer Summers provided was a good overview of the County without getting into too much detail. The Board thanked her for her time. The Finance Committee Meeting ended at 9:44 a.m.

The Board discussed a letter they drafted addressed to the City Mayor that informs the council of a 3.7% increase to the Law Enforcement Services and Court Services provided by the County. Chairman Dixon stated that the increase is just under \$100 increase for court services monthly and just under \$1,000 monthly for law enforcement services. The Board agreed to sign the letter and send it to the city.

Engineer Wege joined the Board to discuss the snow and ice policy. He stated that there is a homeowner on Bosley Grade that gets a permit to use the closed road during winter. Engineer Wege is looking into the permit and would like to add language to reiterate the lack of obligation the county has to service that road before issuing the permit. He stated that the current permit states that the county shall not relieve the permittee of damage done to the property but does not state anything about the county's responsibility. Chairman Dixon requested a copy of the permit for them to review. The Board recessed at 9:50 a.m. until 10:00 a.m.

The Board met with public health from 10:00 a.m. to 11:15 a.m.

The Board met with CTA 11:15 a.m. until 11:45 a.m.

The Board went back into regular session at 11:45 a.m. Adam Hodges, the County's Risk Pool Manager, joined the Board to discuss the County's insurance premiums. Mr. Hodges handed out information regarding the county's annual renewal with the risk pool. There is a 52.6% rate increase to the county's premium for 2024. Mr. Hodges stated that previously it was discussed that there was a potential for a 60% increase. He went into some explanation that led to the premium increase, which included the risk pool electing to increase the self-insured retention from \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 which was done because it takes pressure of the reinsurers to not have to pay claims so early or so often. Mr. Hodges speculates that the increase is in part because of having to fund this new self-insured pool. Chairman Dixon stated that a lot of lawsuits and things are settled before you reach \$500,000-\$750,000 so this would keep claims from going to the reinsurers. Chairman Dixon stated that there are some things that the County can do within the first year to reduce the premiums and the County is working on this. Mr. Hodges stated that there are reductions on the cyber liability insurance policy, and Commissioner Ledgerwood

reached out to discuss those changes. Commissioner Ledgerwood informed Mr. Hodges that the County does use a multi-authentication system now, so that will allow the County full access to the cyber liability insurance of \$2 million. There was discussion regarding the amounts assessed to the County's buildings; Mr. Hodges stated that there was a 5.3% increase on buildings to account for inflation. Chairman Dixon stated that a lot of the increase is due to insurance companies not wanting to do business in Washington State due to the legislature and the risk involved. Commissioner Ledgerwood asked why each county has different increases to their premiums even though they are within the same risk pool. Mr. Hodges stated that it is due to each individual county's claims, L&I hours worked, and risk management issues. There was discussion on how the current risk pool compares to the previous risk pool, and it seems that both risk pools are seeing similar increases in premiums. Chairman Dixon stated that another option would be to self-insure certain items. He stated that Clear Risk is working with their insurers and secondary insurers to help reduce risk and bring rates down. Engineer Wege stated that he thinks there are building values that aren't accurate, and Mr. Hodges stated that the County might be able to discuss some of those values with the insurance company, but they use a flat amount when figuring valuation of rebuild which is \$261 per square foot on all buildings with a few exceptions. Mr. Hodges gave the Board the facility review summary and there was discussion about the county's response; Chairman Dixon stated that the County has taken action on some of these items. Commissioner Ledgerwood asked if this has been discussed with Shaniece, County Maintenance Manager, and Engineer Wege stated that there were some items that he has discussed with Shaniece. Commissioner Nelson asked what the insurance company wants for a response and Mr. Hodges stated that photos and documentation of improvements are what the insurance company is looking for in the County's response. Mr. Hodges stated that he is also working on the inland marine policy for fiber optics, stating that Garfield County always had a policy with Nationwide for the fiber optic cables that the county owns, but Nationwide is getting out of government entities. Mr. Hodges stated that he is having a really hard time getting a replacement policy for the county. He stated that we have \$60,000 in fiber optics and no one is in the market to insure utility lines. He is not done trying but he is struggling. He stated that the premium for this policy is around \$2,500 per year but the county then has a \$7,000+ deductible with this policy. There was discussion regarding self-insuring this policy if Mr. Hodges can't find another insurance company that will write this policy.

Chairman Dixon stated that a former Walla Walla County Commissioner does infrastructure and code compliance work and is having a workshop that he plans to attend in Walla Walla. He stated that Walla Walla County is currently using this individual's services to help on grant compliance.

The Board reviewed consultant applications for design and construction engineering for the next phase of Kirby Mayview project. Engineer Wege stated that this is not like a bid opening, and selection of candidates is not based upon the lowest bid. He continued that these are statements of qualifications and that within these applications, they will choose the applicants that are qualified and then an interview panel will conduct interviews to continue the selection process. Commissioner Ledgerwood asked if the county would select just one applicant and Engineer Wege stated that there would be one applicant selected for each project. The Board proceeded to open applications. The applicants that applied include SynTier Engineering out of Pullman, WA, TranTech Engineering, LLC, out of Tumwater, WA, Keller Associates, Inc. out of Clarkston,

WA, TD&H Engineering out of Lewiston, ID, and ALLWEST Testing & Engineering out of Lewiston, ID. There was discussion regarding the number of applicants and Engineer Wege stated that he was happy with how many applications they received. He stated that he anticipates doing this same process for the other two projects coming up. These projects are the Lower Deadman Safety project which will include widening the road and installing guardrail down by the slough and Kirby Mayview Safety project which will install guardrail along the section of road from where the road starts along the river and continue the guardrail to the dam. The Board thanked him for his time.

Auditor McKenzie Lueck spoke to the Board about the Washington Paid Family Medical Leave rate decreasing for 2024 and she asked the Board if they would like to continue splitting the new rate with the employees 50/50. Chairman Dixon stated that the Board would like to continue to split the rate 50/50 with the employees as they have done previously.

The Board was in executive session from 12:40 p.m. until 1:00 p.m. for an employee performance review. The Board went into executive session from 1:05 p.m. until 1:56 p.m. for an employee performance review.

The Board went back into regular session at 1:59 p.m. Chairman Dixon stated that the Employees' Group requested 4% increase to all salaries and to raise the VEBA from \$100 per month per eligible employee to \$150 per month per eligible employee. The Board's response to the employee's request was they agreed to the 4% increase to all wages and salaries. The Board also agreed to keep the medical insurance and the dependent costs for employees' the same as well as covering the employee's dental, vision, life insurance, and base long-term disability increases and to increase the VEBA to \$125 per month per eligible employee. Commissioner Ledgerwood stated that he appreciates that the Employees Group came with a reasonable request. Commissioner Nelson stated that he appreciates the work the employees do and wants them to be compensated appropriately. There was discussion regarding when the budgets will be ready for adoption, which will be towards the beginning of December.

There was a discussion regarding the emergency management position that is currently open. It was decided that the Board will draft an advertisement for the position to try to fill it.

Commissioner Ledgerwood brought up discussion regarding Washington Association of Counties (WSAC) dues and special assessments. Commissioner Nelson and Commissioner Ledgerwood recently attended the County Leaders Conference in Spokane, WA, where there was a WSAC meeting. Commissioner Nelson stated that it was discussed within the meeting that Garfield County's dues would go up even higher, but their vote would count for less than 1 full voting member. Commissioner Nelson stated that fortunately this did not pass, but the dues are going up, however Garfield County will still get one vote. Commissioner Ledgerwood stated that King County requested to pay the median of the fees and immediately there were three other counties that requested the same thing. There was discussion regarding the benefits of Garfield County continuing to be a member of WSAC, or if the lack of representation was enough to cease from being a member.

The following voucher payments were approved for payment:

Claims Clearing Fund

Numbers: 70374	Through: 70423	Totaling: <u>\$86,983.25</u>
Numbers: 70448	Through: 70476	Totaling: <u>\$89,458.92</u>

The Commissioners regular meeting adjourned at 2:15 p.m. with the next regular meeting set for Monday, November 27th, 2023, at 9:00 a.m. in the Commissioner's Chambers at the Garfield County Courthouse.

/s/ McKenzie Lueck
Attest: Clerk of the Board

/s/ Justin Dixon
Chairman, Board of Garfield County Commissioners