



WASCO COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
WORK SESSION  
APRIL 11, 2019

PRESENT: Steve Kramer, Chair  
Scott Hege, Vice-Chair  
Kathy Schwartz, County Commissioner

STAFF: Kathy White, Executive Assistant  
Tyler Stone, Administrative Officer

At 9:00 a.m. Chair Kramer opened the Work Session.

**Boat Ramp**

Vice-Chair Hege reported that he spoke to the Oregon State Marine Board. He explained that South Wasco Park and Recreation District is bound to work with the lowest bidder for the boat ramp project; unfortunately, the lowest bidder is still over their budget. He said they can now try to negotiate prices; the Marine Board has done that before and they are happy to facilitate that discussion. He stated that there are a number of items that could potentially reduce costs for the project.

Further discussion ensued regarding funding and timelines. County Clerk and SWPRD Liaison Lisa Gambie stated that SWPRD has worked very hard to get this project off the ground; this is probably the closest they will ever get. She said that if each group could put in a little money and costs could be reduced, we could reach the finish line.

Vice-Chair Hege said bids have a life span – time is of the essence. Further discussion occurred regarding the logistics of negotiations.

**County Counsel**

Mr. Stone said that we have until October 31<sup>st</sup> to give notice to Timmons Law. With more time-sensitive matters at the forefront, putting out a request for qualifications is not his current priority; Timmons can continue to provide legal counsel for now.

Vice-Chair Hege suggested that the Management Team or some subset of the Management Team with a higher level of interest could finish the draft RFQ and run the process of vetting and interviewing applicants.

### Municipal Court

Mr. Stone pointed out that this is the City's decision. He said there is a stakeholder meeting this afternoon. He observed that Circuit Court will experience the greatest impact due to the conflict with the Wolfs which means Judge Stauffer will see 99% of the new cases in her courtroom. He stated that Circuit Court will take whatever cases come to them, but it will extend the time it takes for cases to come to trial. He added that it will likely mean additional staff in the District Attorney's Office.

Vice-Chair Hege commented that, like Building Codes, this is coming to us whether we like it or not. He noted that the city is keeping Traffic Court which generates funds.

### NORCOR Budget

Commissioner Schwartz stated that the NORCOR budget includes a 16% subsidy increase over last year; they are asking for more staff, increased medical services, insurance, filling the gap from lost grant funding and other cost increases. She said that as she understands it, Hood River has already said they cannot fund additional subsidy payments. She stated that she wants to be clear about Wasco County's position before the next NORCOR meeting.

Discussion ensued regarding the consequences of various positions. Mr. Stone stated that it is important to maintain parity among the counties; if one pays – all pay. He said that they are getting more in rental fees and yet continue to ask for more funding. Somewhere along the way the philosophy shifted from having services to offset costs; instead of reducing costs to counties, costs are increasing.

Further discussion ensued regarding the perceived problems at NORCOR. Commissioner Schwartz commented that one of the weaknesses of the organization is that it is not easy to get information. She said she will continue to ask questions. Vice-Chair Hege commented that we need to maintain the partnership with all the counties. Commissioner Schwartz agreed, saying this is a good time to dig into the philosophy and clarify the mission of the organization. She said she would like to get the NORCOR Board to commit to a process.

Mr. Stone said that the NORCOR Board went through a process at AOC two years ago to get on track; it was a miserable failure – almost nothing came from the task force’s recommendations. He said this is very important as NORCOR is the County’s single biggest expense. The Board encouraged Commissioner Schwartz to continue to press for answers.

Juvenile Director Molly Rogers offered to answer any NORCOR questions she could. Commissioner Schwartz explained that the Board has decided to give the same response to NORCOR as Hood River and wait for the response. She said they want to be equitable.

Ms. Rogers stated that in the past Juvenile and Adult budgets were done separately at NORCOR. Now, they are trying to look at costs across the facility – medical director, IT, finance, legal maintenance – to identify shared services that can be covered out of shared revenue. They are able to meet approximately 89% of shared expenses out of shared revenue.

Further discussion ensued regarding the management of the number of inmates. Ms. Rogers explained that the facility is the purview of the Board; the supervisory authority for the inmates lies with the Sheriff.

### Union Agreement

Human Resources Director Nichole Biechler reported that the union contract mediation was successful with a 3.1% increase which will be what all staff receives this year. She said union staff will move off of the matrix once this agreement is completed . . . they prefer to negotiate rate increases.

Vice-Chair Hege asked what the impact of that separation will be. Ms. Biechler replied that there is concern that there will be issues when the arrangement becomes common knowledge among staff. Mr. Stone commented that if WCLEA negotiates higher increases than market, there will be a problem. Ms. Biechler observed that we have invested in a culture that should support open conversations with staff. Mr. Stone said we need to have informal meetings with staff to get their feedback on benefits – we will need to do that to be competitive in any case.

Further discussion ensued regarding the compensation program and union negotiations. Mr. Stone stated that we have some work to do around compensation; it needs to be updated in general and in response to the Pay Equity


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Act. Some of the items mentioned for review were the tiered system, training, job descriptions, discipline, comparables, compensation and the reclassification process. Ms. Biechler noted that compared to other counties around the state, we are in a good position to address changes required by the Pay Equity Act. She announced that we are bringing in professionals to help us evaluate our philosophy and processes. Vice-Chair Hege commented that the market does not seem to keep pace with COLA – 3% over three years seems low.

The session adjourned at 11:48 a.m.

Wasco County  
Board of Commissioners

  
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Steven D. Kramer, Board Chair

  
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Scott C. Hege, Vice-Chair

  
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Kathleen B. Schwartz, County Commissioner