

New Commissioner Onboarding

Current Hot Topics

This is an abbreviated list of the current issues currently being considered by the County Court (or coming soon). This is not an all-inclusive list and there have probably been more issues that have arisen as I typed this out. I have tried to present the basic information here. In places where I have offered opinions on certain issues I have tried to clearly mark those as being my opinion. Sandy

Current "Hot" Issues

1. County College and other trainings

- a. Liz, Sherrie, and Sandy are all enrolled and will begin the year-long course in Mid-January.
- b. Judge's training for Liz is in Reno in June.

2. County Grant Program

- a. The Court has been discussing the need to formalize the County's grant program since July. Unfortunately, little progress has been made as this issue has been conflated with other issues (Strategic Plan for Economic Development, SIP Agreements, etc.). This is a vital discussion as the Court grants 3-4 million dollars per year.
- b. *Sandy's Opinion: The Court needs to isolate the Grant Programs from other topics and make necessary changes prior to the spring grant cycles.*

3. Strategic Plan for Economic Development

- a. The plan is out of date and either needs to be revised or replaced, if the Court wants to have, and use, one.
- b. There has also been discussion that the County might want a Strategic Plan that goes beyond just Economic Development.

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4. Summit Springs Village (SSV)

- a. Summit Springs is in serious trouble. Their resident numbers have been dwindling for years, going from having a waiting list to being less than half full. Staff turnover has also been rampant and they struggle to maintain even a basic level of services. SSV is now reliant on annual County subsidies to stay solvent.
- b. As you are no doubt aware, the State's Medicaid system has been significantly expanded in recent years. Unfortunately, the costs of the expanded program are enormous and largely unfunded. As a result many changes have been implemented, including the system for "scoring" elderly Medicaid recipient's levels of service. Over the last year the Dept. of Human Services (DHS) has met with the residents of SSV, and recipients throughout the state, and rescored them. Being proud sorts of people, the local residents were mostly unwilling to be honest about the level of care they required. As a result most of them have now been reclassified to a lower level of Medicaid funding, which may force many of them to move into less expensive housing. This is bad for Summit Springs as they will lose even more residents, and bad for the residents as they will lose their homes. The entire situation was compounded because SSV didn't offer their residents any support through the DHS Survey process, nor did they communicate with our Senior Services Coordinator so that she could have helped the residents in the process.
- c. The decline at SSV has now reached the point where the State has effectively taken control of the facility. DHS has installed contract consultants to oversee the operations at SSV and attempt to bring them into compliance with the law. The final

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straw was a series of failed reviews over the last year based on serious breaches safety, prescription drug, and reporting rules. Judge Shaffer, Senior Services Coordinator Sabrina Wagenaar and I have had several meetings with the SSV Board, and the information they have provided has been extremely inaccurate; leading me to feel that either they are being misled by their managers or they are themselves trying to hide the true depth of SSV's problems. At one point the Judge was even considering having the County step in as a conservator of the facility, but then we found out that the State already has. SSV cannot take in new residents until DHS feels they have gotten into compliance.

- d. *Sandy's Opinion: The SSV managers don't seem to care and the SSV Board doesn't seem to be able/willing to address the root problems within the organization.*

5. Columbia Hills Manor

- a. This summer the Columbia Hills Manor Board began communicating with the County, and other agencies/organizations, about a desire to move out of the building management side of the business. Board membership has dwindled, several of the last remaining want to retire from it, and for various reasons have not brought on any new board members. When the Board spoke with the Court this summer they seemed to backtrack on what they had said previously and balked at the idea of giving up control of either the apartment complex or the Gronquist Building.
- b. The Gronquist Building has basically sat empty since it was built using County granted funds. It is occasionally used for community events or meetings, but has not had a long-term tenant move in. Judge Shaffer has made efforts to bring in a

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group of medical/dental providers to turn the building into a health/medical center.

6. Building Codes

- a. New rules were enacted that basically said building and construction inspection services could not be done by private contractors anymore, and had to be overseen by a government body. This created a lot of chaos, was partially responsible for the collapse of the Mid-Columbia Council of Governments (MCCOG), and has left our area with a lack of qualified inspectors; slowing construction projects to a crawl. Previous to the rule change, MCCOG provided the services to Wasco, Sherman, Gilliam, and Wheeler counties. After the rule change, the State took temporary control of building codes (operating out of The Dalles) and asked the counties and cities to come up with a plan to replace the lost contract services by the end of the year.
- b. Although we have had a year to come up with a plan, no one really has. Wasco County originally discussed partnering with the City of The Dalles to provide services for the area, then said they didn't want to do it. Recently the State made it clear that if Wasco County didn't operate the services, the State would close down the The Dalles office and consolidate their services in Pendleton. This has led to Wasco County/City of The Dalles deciding to provide building codes services at a joint meeting on the 19th of November. Gilliam/Wheeler/Sherman have been offered to join with Wasco, however the offer includes stipulations about charging additional "travel" fees to inspect projects in the three counties, which has been a sticking point. Another consideration is that there are \$3-4 million in reserves

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leftover from the MCCOGG organization that Wasco County is sitting on that belong to all four counties. There are disagreements over that money to be worked out.

- c. Another option is to simply let the State keep control of building codes and be serviced out of the Pendleton office. This will do little to ease the problems of delays waiting for inspections.
- d. Lastly, the three counties, possibly also including Morrow County, could come up with their own shared building codes program.

7. Job descriptions Need to be Signed

- a. Over the last 1-2 years the County spent a lot of money contracting with Local Government Personnel Institute (LGPI) to update all of the job descriptions for the County. These have been finalized and approved, but have not been signed by the employees.

8. Employee Policy Manual Needs Updated

- a. An effort was started with LGPI two years ago to update the employee policy manual. Mostly they just removed a lot of stuff. Updating the manual was then put on the back-burner until the new Union Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) was completed, so that any changes could be captured in the new manual. The CBA is now approved and in place, so we need to address the manual and bring it up to date with both the CBA and changes in the law.
- b. *Sandy's Opinion: This is a very time consuming task that I don't feel we have the staffing available to complete. Many things on this list haven't been completed for the same reason.*

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9. Courthouse Repair/Maintenance

- a. Roof – The funds were budgeted this year to repair the Courthouse Roof, it is scheduled for the work to occur this spring.
- b. Windows – The exterior windows in the Courthouse need to be replaced. This is a significant capital expense that will need to be budgeted for.

10. Hollen & Sons Warehouse

- a. The old warehouse behind the County Library is currently used to store library materials and old furniture. It is in increasingly poor condition and it has been discussed that the building should be demolished. The sidewalk along the building is also in very bad condition. Despite multiple Court discussions, no concrete plan has been developed for the building or for how the site might be redeveloped for future use.

11. Auditor Contract

- a. We have recently put out a Request for Quotes for annual audit services. The County has been with the same auditor for nearly two decades and it was discussed that it might be good to have a fresh set of eyes. It is important to note that there were no issues with the current auditor's performance and they have also been asked to submit a quote. Quotes are due in early January.

12. Shutler Station Industrial Park

- a. Batch Plant
 - i. Leased by Thompson Bros. Construction
 - 1. Sub-Leased to Hood River Sand & Gravel for windmill re-powering project.
 - 2. WI Construction has also shown interest in a sub-lease.

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- ii. Upgrades/Repairs Under Consideration
 - 1. Control System (\$30-40k)
 - 2. Water Heater (\$30k)
- b. Omega Morgan
 - i. Is entering into a 6 month lease of the entire Industrial Park lay-down area as part of the Montague Windmill Project. Omega Morgan brings in the wind turbine components on rail cars, trans-loads them onto trucks and delivers them to the construction sites. Omega Morgan has been a long-term lessee at Shutler Station and will want to return to a 3-acre lease and track usage agreement following the windfarm construction project.
- c. RES
 - i. RES is the construction general contractor for the Montague Project. At one point they were interested in renting the Grain Lab to use as an office during construction, but that has since fallen through.
- d. Water Usage Agreement
 - i. Also for the Montague Project, Keven Haguewood is entering into a water purchase agreement to utilize the well at Shutler Station. Our well will be used as a back-up to Keven's own farm well. The water will be primarily used to mix concrete for the windmill foundations.
- e. Ardent Mills
 - i. Ardent Mills is the latest name of the company leasing the flour blending building at Shutler Station. This summer we dealt with roof leak issues. Jeff Schott also identified a number of concerns on the external portions of the building that should be further evaluated and addressed.

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- f. Train Yard
 - i. Jeff Schott has developed preliminary plans for expansion of the County owned rail yard.
 - ii. Jeff Schott has also drawn up conceptual plans for a Rail Car Repair Building. There have been discussions with a company that would operate the building if the County would build it.
- g. Grain Lab
 - i. The Grain Lab needs to be seriously marketed. The local real estate agents have been consulted and have lots of ideas but have not been able to bring in a lessee. Peter Mitchell also keeps an eye out for potential renters.

13. Port of Arlington

- a. 2006 IGA for the Willow Creek Barge Dock/Rock Quarry (Repayment of Debt)
 - i. In the early 2000's there was an effort to build a barge dock on Port of Arlington property at the Mouth of Willow Creek to allow garbage to be barged up the Columbia and then trans-loaded and hauled to Columbia Ridge Landfill. Unfortunately, issues raised by the Umatilla Tribe and miss-steps by the U.S. Corp of Engineers caused the project to fail. By this point the County and a State grant had paid for a bridge across I-84 to the site, opening up of a rock quarry, and partial construction (then later removal) of the dock. As part of the project the County provided around Two-Million dollars in cash and in-kind services, including work performed by the Road Dept. and legal fees. A Connect Oregon grant provided the bulk of the rest of the project costs. The Port had staff time involved. After things fell apart there was a court battle, at County expense, to get the Corp of Engineers to reimburse the

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project costs since it was their mistakes that doomed the project. Eventually the Corp paid an amount to the Port, some of which was used to remove the dock pilings from the river, and the rest was pocketed by the Port under the auspices that they might have to pay back the Connect Oregon Grant. The County, which had made the significant financial contributions to the project did not receive any reimbursement. If the project has gone through as planned the County was supposed to be reimbursed according to the terms of an agreement between the County and the Port signed in 2006. The agreement stipulated that the County would over time receive \$750,000 from tonnage fees assessed on barge traffic and nearly \$470,000 from the sale of quarried rock. This agreement to repay the County over \$1.2 million has never been cancelled, amended, or replaced.

- ii. Peter Mitchell's belief is that the agreement ceased to matter when the project failed. And that the funds weren't "loaned", but were "invested". (*Sandy's Opinion: I don't feel that the distinction between loaned or invested matters. Even if it was "invested" there should be an effort made to make the investor whole when the project fell through. The Port doesn't just get to take the money, especially considering that they didn't put any money into the project.*)
 - iii. In the coming months there needs to be a joint meeting between the Court and the Port to work this all out.
- b. Willow Creek Irrigation Feasibility Study
- i. The Court provided funding to the Port for this project. It became a bit of an issue because the County Budget Committee (made up of the Court and three appointed citizen

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members) originally declined the Port's request for funding. The Port then came back after the budget process and the Court decided to fund the request from the previous year's budget.

- c. Economic Development Office
 - i. The question has been raised, should the Port continue to be the County's Economic Development Office, and if so, what changes/documentation need to be implemented to ensure the relationship is mutually beneficial?
 - ii. There is no written agreement between the County and the Port, nor is there any established process for the Court to give input/direction to the Port about the Court's priorities/goals.

14. Pay Equity Law

- a. The new Pay Equity Law takes effect on January 1st, 2019. To be ready we will need to: review our hiring documents and procedures; conduct a Salary Survey to ensure work of similar character is being paid fairly to all employees.
- b. We may run into issues due to the CBA, as most of our employees are union represented and their salary schedules are negotiated with the Union.
- c. *Sandy's Opinion: We should be in pretty good shape since our salary schedule is entirely based on longevity. The issues I can possibly foresee are going to be with employees who were started at a higher step than others, the Sheriff's Office not following salary schedules, and with a lack of documentation throughout.*

15. County Safety Committee

- a. Hasn't met in a long time, needs to become active again.

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16. Court/County Staffing

- a. Morale could use a boost; I am just going to leave that there.
- b. *Sandy's Opinion: The County Court is understaffed and underutilized; which I realize sounds like a contradiction. This opinion was also held by my predecessor and by Judge Shaffer. When so much has been placed on one person something has to give and it is difficult to maintain a high quality of work. At the same time, there is so much more that a Court staff could and should be providing to the members of the Court. Most people don't have a full understanding of what is asked of the Court Administrator position. Some see it as an administrative assistant doing clerical tasks. Others see it as a lead administration role within the county dealing with many of the most important issues that arise. The truth is that it is both, and so much more. Over the years this position has grown and changed, becoming very unique within county governments. It now has most of the responsibilities of a County Administrator but with little of the authority. Beginning as an administrative aid to the Judge, more and more responsibility has been added over the years and the job description has grown. For all intents and purposes it is a Chief of Staff for the Court, but it is also the only direct support staff for the Court. Balancing the repetitive nature of the clerical side of things with the non-stop flow of "emergencies" is difficult to maintain. I would like to see the Court consider options to expand staffing to meet the needs of the Court and the County.*
- c. Staffing areas that need to be looked at:

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- i. County Court
 - 1. Court Administrator
 - 2. Administrative Assistant
 - ii. HR/Risk Management
 - iii. Transportation
 - 1. Driver
 - 2. Dispatcher
 - iv. Planning Dept.
- d. Contracted Services vs. County Staff
- i. The following are areas where the County spends a lot of money each year on contracted services that might be able to be consolidated into County jobs. Another option would be to look at the potential to share positions in the Tri-County area, possibly by forming an ORS 190 Organization
 - 1. Legal Counsel
 - 2. HR/Labor Issues
 - 3. Planning
 - 4. Court Stenographer
 - 5. IT Services (ESD)

17. Frontier TelNet (FTN)

- a. Day Wireless runs the system for FTN. Day Wireless is supposed to be working on a plan to update the County Owned Communication Infrastructure
- b. E-Rate Funds
 - i. Have not been paid, may not be paid. Huge financial loss for FTN. If they don't come through either Frontier 911 or the Counties may have to come up with funds to keep FTN afloat.
- c. Mike Smith is the current (Manager?).
 - i. *Sandy's Opinion: He is probably running for the hills or fired.*

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18. Frontier Regional 911

- a. There is interest from Wasco County in joining Frontier 911. This would be a financial boon for the system but it would also mean moving the 911 Call center (and jobs) out of Condon.

19. ESD/IT Services

- i. The ESD has been providing contract IT Service to the County. Recently both of their IT people quit and Columbia Gorge ESD staff is currently filling in. Service lately has been poor and we have no idea when it might improve.
- ii. There has been discussion about changing our IT service provider, but it has always stalled over concerns that the ESD can't afford to lose our business.

20. Committees and Boards Assignments/Appointments

- a. There are a large number of appointments, assignments, and declarations that need to be made in December/January.

21. Union

- a. The so called "Janus Decision" declared that government employees can no longer be forced to pay Union dues. We have already had one employee request that the dues no longer be taken out of their paycheck.

22. Budget

- a. Gilliam County operates on a fiscal year running from July 1st to June 30th, meaning we are currently at mid-year for the budget. There are several budget line items that need to be watched as the early expenses were higher than expected, especially for contracted services.
- b. In February we will need to set the Budget Calendar and begin building the next year's budget.

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- c. Statutorily, the Treasurer is required to provide the Court monthly reports on Loans/Investments. My understanding is that this has not happened since Nathan took over the office. The Court will need to decide if this is a battle you want to fight.

23. DMV Lease

- a. The DMV has maintained a service location within the Courthouse for a very long time, but there has never been a lease agreement for the office they utilize. Last year the DMV issued notice that they needed to have a lease put in place. The lease would be for zero dollars, but they let slip that they would be requesting upgrades as part of the lease agreement. This was left off several months ago that DMV was supposed to inspect the premises and get back to us with any requested upgrades before we moved any further. We haven't heard a word from them since and service continues on the first Thursday of each month.

24. Employee Reviews

- a. Have not been done, need to be done.

25. Non-Partisan Commissioners/Elections

- a. We are one of the few Counties who still have partisan commissioners. After Wheeler made the change last election we received a number of citizen comments suggesting Gilliam should also make this change.

26. Pat & Leah Shannon

- a. Want the County to help fund the purchase and renovation of the Village Inn Restaurant in Arlington.

27. Airbase Road

- a. The folks who own the Airbase would like to vacate the cul-de-sac road serving the housing sub-division to the County. The

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road is in extremely poor condition and needs to be completely torn out and rebuilt. The question is whether the County should take on that expense and what precedent that might set for other people who would like the County to take care of their privately owned roads as well? This has come to the Court on multiple occasions over the years. And will be brought before the Court at the second January meeting.

28. Legal Counsel

- a. Our current legal counsel is Ruben Cleaveland of Annala, Carey, VanKoten & Cleaveland in Hood River. Ruben replaced long-time counsel Will Carey after he passed away last year. Ruben has done a good job for the County.
- b. We do not have, nor have we ever had, a contract for these legal services. This is despite being with the same law firm for over twenty years.
- c. Some concerns have been raised over the fact that many of the counties, cities, and districts in the area also utilize Ruben as their legal counsel. This creates the potential for conflict of interest, as will be seen in the discussions with the Port of Arlington mentioned above.

29. Sheriff Sales

- a. Current Sheriff Sales of tax-foreclosed properties include the recent sale of 221 N. Potter St. in Condon. The sale requires abatement of the nuisances at the property within 180 days or the County can take it back.
- b. The sale of the vacant lot (#801) in Arlington is scheduled for January 10th on the Courthouse steps.

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30. Wildfire Mitigation Mapping Pilot Project

- a. The Gilliam Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) made a proposal and funding request in October to conduct a mapping program designed to aid in firefighting and fire restoration activities. They were asked to bring back more details and we haven't heard from them since.

31. Fiber projects running through the County

- a. Robinson Bros. Construction is running a line through the county which will eventually complete a loop through Oregon, Idaho, and Nevada. They are renting the Gilliam County Fairgrounds and Burns Park through the winter.
- b. WindWave is starting the joint fiber project with the City of Condon from Cedar Springs to Condon.

32. Lonerock Bridge Replacement Project

- a. The County has just selected Anderson Perry & Associates as the design and project management firm for this project. Over the next couple of years we will need to select a general contractor and implement the project. This will be a major project for the Road Dept.

33. Burns Park Upgrades

- a. This year we made several investments into upgrading Burns Park. This includes upgrading the electrical and water systems in the camping spots, adding a public WIFI system, and adding another wheelchair ramp for the pavilion. The Court also approved additional upgrades to the pavilion, including new sinks and countertops and a built in BBQ, which will be installed as weather and staff time allows.

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34. NORCOR

- a. With the recent resignation of the administrator at NORCOR, the Sheriffs of the four counties have proposed that they take over administration of the adult facility, with the County's Juvenile Directors taking charge of the juvenile side. It has been agreed to try it out. The NORCOR Board will still have budget and general oversight.
- b. The lawsuit seeking to force NORCOR to end the contract with the federal government to house ICE inmates is still going on. The contract represents a significant portion of the Jail's budget and if it were to go away portions of the facility would probably have to be shuttered, reducing inmate capacity and eliminating employees.

35. Arlington TV Co-Op

- a. They are falling behind the benchmarks for where the system is supposed to be by now. I'm not sure what else to say here, but it should be looked into at some point.

36. Internship Program

- a. Prior to or as part of the budget discussion the Court should address concerns over how this program is being run and if all students are being given an equal opportunity to participate.

37. Juvenile Court/Probate

- a. It's impossible to guess what might come up or when. In the short-term both Gilliam and Sherman Counties will be reliant on Judge Morley in Wheeler County to act as Judge Pro-Tem.