

June 17, 2020

The Lincoln County Board of Commissioners met for a regular session on June 17, 2020 in the Lincoln County Courthouse, Libby, Montana. Present were Commissioner Peck, Commissioner Bennett, County Administrator Patrick McFadden and Clerk and Recorder Robin Benson. Commissioner Letcher was present via VisionNet.

Commissioner Peck opened the meeting with the **Pledge of Allegiance**.

10:30 AM **Administrative Issues:** Present were Wendy Drake, Heather Benjamin, Suzanne Resch, Ray Stout and Derrick Perkins. Also present was Nikki Meyer, Eureka via VisionNet.

- Patrick submitted Resolution 2020-12. A resolution requesting distribution of bridge and road safety and accountability program funds. Patrick said this is an annual resolution as part of the budget process. **Motion** by Commissioner Bennett to approve Resolution 2020-12 as submitted. Second by Commissioner Letcher, motion carried unanimously.
- Patrick submitted a Road Project Agreement between Lincoln County and the Forest Service for a paving project on Callahan Creek Road. The purpose is to document the cooperation in the paving and other needed maintenance of the Callahan 427 road to facilitate snowplowing and driver safety. **Motion** by Commissioner Bennett to approve the project agreement as submitted for paving on Callahan Creek Road. Second by Commissioner Letcher, motion carried unanimously.
- Patrick submitted the results of an online employee survey for a summer picnic. Patrick said the survey is informational for planning purposes and he will follow up with more information.
- Wendy shared a new update to the county website for viewing budget information for county use and for the public. The public can see budgets with breakdowns by departments and expenditures. The information is pulled from Black Mountain budget software. The commissioners commended Wendy and Heather for their work.
- Robin presented the minutes for June 10 regular meeting and June 12 special session for approval. **Motion** by Commissioner Bennett to approve minutes as submitted. Second by Commissioner Letcher, motion carried unanimously.

10:45 AM **Public Comment Time:** There were no public comments.

11:00 AM **District Board Appointments:** Present were Derrick Perkins and Ray Stout. Also present was Nikki Meyer, Eureka via VisionNet.

Robin said board vacancies were advertised in the Western News, The Tobacco Valley News, Lincoln County Website and were placed on the Libby Courthouse and Eureka Annex Public Bulletin Boards. Robin said there were no applications received for any board above the number of vacancies open.

Board appointments were as follows:

Airport Board-Jim Perhay

Eureka Dispatch-Jim Dicks

Troy Dispatch-James Ward

Fisher River-Dan Whetstone, Agnes Kemp

Boyd Hill Cemetery-Charles Leidigh, Clayton Rockwell

Fortine/Trego Cemetery-Sally Warren, David Billow

Library Board-Chuck Gerheim

Motion by Commissioner Bennett to approve board appointments as presented. Second by Commissioner Letcher, motion carried unanimously.

11:15 AM **McCurry Road Easement:** Present were Sheriff Darren Short, Brett McCully, Derrick Perkins and Ray Stout. Also present we Nikki Meyer, Eureka via VisionNet.

Brett talked about the history of the McCurry land. Brett submitted maps of the roads showing where surveys have discrepancies of location. McCurry's had new surveys conducted to outline and correct the boundaries. Brett said its very generous of the homeowner and the easements cleans up all discrepancies. Easements will be recorded in the Clerk and Recorder's Office. **Motion** by Commissioner Letcher to accept easements on the McCurry properties as presented. Second by Commissioner Bennett, motion carried.

11:30 AM **Animal Control Position Discussion:** Present were Sheriff Darren Short, Undersheriff Brad Dodson, HR Director Dallas Bowe, Finance Officer Wendy Drake, Kathi Hooper, Ray Stout, and Derrick Perkins. Also present was Nikki Meyer, Eureka via VisionNet.

Sheriff Darren Short submitted a projected cost analysis for a non-sworn animal control deputy vs. sworn animal control deputy. The position was formerly filled by a retired deputy which allowed him to carry a firearm and allowed him flexibility to perform other law enforcement duties. The current animal control deputy has accepted a new position in the maintenance department. Darren said his preference is to have a sworn deputy now that the position has become available again. Darren said the annual cost increase for a sworn deputy would be approximately \$17,638 and he is requesting an increase in the animal control budget to accommodate a sworn animal control deputy. Brad commented the in-cost expenses will be employer benefits.

Commissioner Peck said he likes the flexibility and is supportive. Commissioner Bennett agreed, but said we still need to have overall budget discussions for fiscal year 20/21. The commissioners agreed it is a necessary position and would be an improvement to law enforcement and the community. **Motion** by Commissioner Bennett to approve hiring a sworn deputy for the animal control position as presented. Second by Commissioner Letcher, motion carried unanimously.

1:30 PM **Elected Salary Review:** Present were Sheriff Darren Short, Clerk of Court Tricia Brooks, JoAn H. Cuffe, Chris Nelson, Bonnie Larson, Robin Swimley, Wendy Drake, Dallas Bowe, and Derrick Perkins. Also present was Nikki Meyer, Eureka via VisionNet.

Commissioner Peck thanked everyone in attendance and stated we are here to discuss salaries for elected officials for FY 20/21. Commissioner Peck clarified that last year's increase was not something the commissioners asked for and explained how the deputy pay was statutorily incorrect in comparison to the sheriff's wage. Commissioner Peck explained how the deputy rates are based on the sheriff's rate, and the sheriff's rate is tied to all other elected officials. The increase last year was to correct the legal deputy and sheriff wage separation. Commissioner Peck expressed that it was the hardest motion he has made during his tenure.

Robin Swimley reminded everyone that the increase last year was also to bring salaries in line with the state average. County Administrator Patrick McFadden introduced himself and presented a PPT presentation to the group. The presentation showed base salaries across Montana and compared Lincoln County rates to counties of similar size and revenue. The presentation also showed COLA norms across Montana, COLA following inflation to preserve purchasing power, and insurance vs. COLA. Patrick stated that his recommendation is to follow inflation from last year and provide a COLA at 2.5%. Based on research of counties of similar size and revenue, Lincoln County falls into the average wage range, although some counties have elected officials that work only part-time. Patrick showed ten years of historical COLA increases for Lincoln County, which included many zero years, yet how the big 20% increase last fiscal year actually affected a 10 year average of 2.5%.

Robin Swimley commented that part of the salary committee discussion last year, was about getting wages back up to average and to make up for those years with no COLA.

Bonnie Larson asked about the employees increase last year; Patrick commented they did receive an increase of 7.5% but not as much as elected officials. Patrick said employee rates will be the discussion topic at the next salary review committee meeting as part of the budget process.

Commissioner Peck commented the county is paying 100% of employee insurance, including all immediate family members.

Patrick expressed that keeping those dollars from employees is arguable. Permissive mills are already approved for insurance.

Commissioner Bennett clarified the appraisal cycle used to be every 6 years, now it is every 2 years, so you will see more consistent revenues.

Robin Swimley commented that hospital claims probably are down due to covid but expressed concern of potential spikes due to people not receiving early diagnosis. Bonnie added that in lieu of what's happened in our country, there will be some affects in the insurance industry that will affect us at the local level.

Patrick informed the committee that Lincoln County is seeing an approximate \$100,000 decrease in worker's compensation premium and stated in his opinion, COLA increases should be in line with annual inflation instead of continued erratic fluctuations from zero to 20%.

Commissioner Peck talked about the need to continually be cognizant to revenue trends in the county, the complexities, and variables to balance a county budget and how SRS funds play into budget decisions.

Patrick expressed that his main driving point from his research is a recommendation to avoid zero COLA's and huge changes like last year's increase and to create a policy that is consistent. If we continually fluctuate and have erratic changes, the perception is we do not know what we are doing.

Robin Swimley commented that it was easy to justify the increase last year, expressing the importance of recruitment and retention; the county needs to have qualified people. Robin asked if there were any trends for tax revenue coming in?

Commissioner Peck explained the DOR does not give the county its revenues (mill levy value) until August. Traditionally, the county budgets based on the current year, and then can pull in other funding decisions once revenues come in from the DOR.

Bonnie commended the county saying that she is impressed with the improvements when there was so much to overcome.

Patrick cautioned against a zero COLA, to discontinue the erratic up and down and to create a consistent policy. Calculating 9 elected officials, plus 20 deputies at 2.5% is approximately \$40,600 total, reminding the committee that worker's compensation premium was reduced by approximately \$100,000 this year. Patrick recommends a modest yearly COLA increase, predictably tied to inflation to bring the county in line with position standards across the state (adjusted for the Local Cost of Living Index). This year a 2.5% COLA is appropriate to match last year's inflation.

Commissioner Peck commented that COLA increases do put more money into the pockets of the employees, it does go into the economy. Having two very competent county administrators, allowing for someone to be focused on budget and process is invaluable; as commissioners, we do not have the time to focus on that. Not only financially, but operationally.

Sheriff Short commented the yo yo wages over the years was a disaster and expressed support for a consistent COLA.

JoAn stated that a 2.5% COLA is a good place to be and totally appropriate and expressed that it's unfortunate that more of the general public in the county are not privy to this information.

Motion by Robin Swimley to recommend a 2.5% COLA increase to elected officials. Second by JoAn Cuffe. Bonnie asked about the non-elected employees. Commissioner Peck said that historically the same has always been granted to the employees except for last year, which had to be done to correct the legal separation of wages between the sheriff and deputies.

Commissioner Peck suggested to leave it flat this year and look at COLA's next year for elected officials. The employees will be reviewed and may receive a COLA.

Patrick again, suggested something, but was opposed to zero, to maintain the separation and to set a standard.

Commissioner Peck said he believes it will be ok to start that next year.

Robin Swimley said the workers comp rate savings would compensate for an increase this year.

Sheriff Darren Short explained deputies cannot receive a COLA unless the sheriff receives one and his rate is based on all other elected officials. If you deny a COLA for elected officials, it is a denial for law enforcement deputies.

Commissioner Letcher said it was a tough call last year and is again this year, but he agrees to the 2.5% COLA this year, but it may not be that way next year.

Robin Swimley commented that was a topic last year, our law enforcement deputies are the employees that go out into danger.

Members of the salary committee in attendance were: Commissioner Peck, Commissioner Bennett, Commissioner Letcher, Bonnie Larson, Robin Swimley, JoAn Cuffe, Clerk of Court Tricia Brooks, and Sheriff Darren Short.

Motion carried. Commissioner Peck voted nay.

3:00 PM **Meeting Adjourned**

LINCOLN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Mark Peck, Chairman

ATTEST: _____
Robin A. Benson, Clerk of the Board