

## BOARD OF MASON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' PROCEEDINGS

December 7, 2009

1. Call to Order – The Chairperson called the special meeting to order at 9:02 a.m.
2. Pledge of Allegiance – Margie Benson led the flag salute.
3. Public Hearing - 2010 Mason County Budget

Cmmr. Gallagher thanked everyone for attending the meeting. He stated that this process has been an open process and there have been numerous changes to the budget. He congratulated Commissioner Ring Erickson and the Auditor for coming up with a deferred payment option for ER&R. If that hadn't been done cuts would be far deeper. He noted that the other issue is unemployment. 55 people have been laid off in the past year, which increased the unemployment rates. In the upcoming budget there are no plans to lay anyone off, so next year the unemployment rates should be much lower. He thanked the League of Women Voters for attending past meetings and for keeping the Board on track.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson stated that this has been a thoughtful and sometimes painful process. She thanked the other elected officials for working hard on coming up with the balance required to get the work done. The community has been well served by paying attention to what is going on with the County budget. Understanding has been increased, but there is never a perfect solution even when there is a lot of money. There will always be disagreement on what the right formula is to move forward into the next year, but the work has been honorable and open. She expressed her appreciation of everyone who participated in the budget process.

Cmmr. Sheldon added his perspective. He attended several budget workshops at the State last week. State revenues have dropped since the June forecast by 686 million. The September forecast was reduced another 283 million. The revenues at the State level continue to drop. In session in January they will be cutting almost 3 billion dollars out of a budget with only about 9 billion dollars available to cut. The County isn't just an island. Revenues will continue to drop. The revenue expectations that have been made for 2010 may not hold true. The Board may be adjusting this budget again in the upcoming months. There have been several workshops and sessions with citizens to help understand the budget. The posting documents that go to the Auditor's office to put items in the budget require at least two signatures. He did not sign the postings for cuts to the Courts, the Prosecutor or the Sheriff. He considers these mandated services and public safety is his top priority. That is also what he is hearing from the public. It is important to listen to what the public is saying and they are saying, do not cut public safety in Mason County.

Theresa Ehrich, Chief Accountant for the Auditor, stated that on September 1<sup>st</sup> she presented the preliminary budget in detail and it was out of balance by 3.1 million. Since that time, there have been many budget workshops. A few changes have been made and there is now a balanced budget. There was a loan that needed to be addressed. She and the Treasurer and Auditor worked with the ER&R manager to get a revolving loan set up. The original loan has been paid back much sooner than planned, which saved about \$20,000 in interest. They also worked on the unemployment premiums. The Board chose to stay self-insured. The layoffs from last year increased the premiums. Because staff is not being eliminated in this budget, there will be \$200,000 savings. They also worked with the Public Works Director, the ER&R Manager and the Board to reduce the amount of money being paid for fees for computer, vehicle and phone usage. The 1.2 million in the Current Expense fund used to pay those fees was reduced by \$750,000.

### Questions for Staff

Cmmr. Sheldon asked if Current Expense pays about 1 million dollars to ER&R and it will be reduced to \$250,000.

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Ms. Ehrich stated that the County pays 4 million dollars to ER&R, but most of it comes from the road department. Current Expense pays 1.2 million and it will be reduced by \$750,000. The reductions will be in vehicle, computer and communications fees.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson asked if that would extend out the replacement of any equipment by about a year.

Ms. Ehrich answered that it would be the Board's decision. It would also be up to Public Works and ER&R. Right now their fund is healthy, but it will need to be reassessed.

Cmmr. Sheldon asked if the County is essentially skipping a payment.

Ms. Ehrich replied that the amount of payment is being reduced by 60%.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson asked the ER&R manager if the Sheriff's office has several vehicles mothballed for backups.

Dave Loser answered that the Sheriff's office has 8 vehicles mothballed right now.

Ms. Ehrich continued with her presentation. On November 10<sup>th</sup> two of the Commissioners asked for a 1% reduction, which resulted in \$200,000 in expenditure reductions. There was an additional reduction of \$138,000 to DCD and Parks. The Budget Department was eliminated, saving almost \$200,000. She feels that the budget is sustainable for 2010. Almost 24 million has been realized for November 2009. The year before there was the same amount of revenue but a 28 million dollar budget. This 2010 budget has 23.4 million in expenditures and 23.8 million in income. They are not presenting a budget where the fund balance balances the budget. There are several departments at 82% for November with the budget authority to spend. If they chose not to spend that money it would help give a beginning fund balance of 2.5 million. Right now the budgeted ending fund balance is at about 1.8 million, so it would make a big difference if the departments with an unexpended budget authority did not utilize it for 2009.

Cmmr. Gallagher asked if the November report reflects previous reductions.

Ms. Ehrich explained that there have been about 1.5 million dollars in adjustments this year. All of the budget reductions are reflected in the November 30, 2009 report. There is a 25 million dollar budget in 2009 after the changes that were made. In 2008 there was a 29 million dollar budget. All of the changes and reductions are reflected in the report. She created a form for the Board this year. All of the changes made after the 1<sup>st</sup> of September, when the budget was presented, were authorized. She also created a one page recap of the changes for Current Expense and the special funds.

Pat Swartos asked which departments the Board did not reduce for 2010.

Cmmr. Sheldon clarified that he did not sign the budget posting sheets for the reduction to the Courts, Prosecutor and Sheriff because he feels they are mandated services. He also did not sign the \$750,000 reduction to the Equipment Repair and Revolving fund.

Ms. Swartos stated she is also part of public safety and criminal justice and her department has been reduced drastically in 2009. She feels that for 2010 it will be another struggle. The ratio per judge is 2.5 to 3 staff. That means that she should have 8 to 9 people to clerk. District Court has 1 judge and they have just as much staff as she does. It has been a struggle and she doesn't know how long she can keep it up.

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An audience member commented that it has been about 3 years since the Deputy Sheriffs have had a pay raise. He understands that two of the Commissioners received a 6% pay raise and one Commissioner received an 8.5% pay raise. He also understands that the Auditor, Assessor and Treasurer have been closed for the lunch hour, which is when most people do their business there. He would like to know how the Commissioners' pay can be increased and not the Deputy Sheriffs pay. Especially during a period when there was tremendous cost of living increases. Frankly, their services are more important than what the Commissioners do.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson responded that the Board cannot legally reduce their own salaries, but both her and Commissioner Gallagher have voluntarily reduced their salaries through donation contributions. She has donated to Parks and Public Health. Both she and Commissioner Gallagher have tried to find a way to compensate for the issue.

Cmmr. Gallagher added that according to the State Constitution, Commissioners cannot adjust their own salary while in office. Last year two Commissioners started a new term so they kept their salary at the 2008 level. By law, he received a 3% raise, which equals about \$2,200. In order to be on the same level as the other Commissioners, he donated his extra salary to the Sheriff and 4-H. He also contributes \$100 per month to United Way. Now all three Commissioners will receive a pay raise, so he will give money to the Rodeo and Fair and continue with his other contributions. With this job the wages increase \$10,000 each term. It is more than enough money so he helps out other areas. He pays the taxes on the money and then gives it away. Former Governors have also had to accept pay raises and chose to donate it. The Sheriff's deputies are going on their fourth year without a contract. When the Board finally hears from the arbitrator there will be an immediate payment.

Cmmr. Sheldon stated that when arbitration comes the Deputies will receive payment, but the Board cannot estimate what the amount will be. The issue is still in arbitration. He noted that he also donates to many Mason County charities.

The audience member asked why it has taken 3 years to renegotiate the deputies' contract.

Cmmr. Sheldon responded that he does not sit at the bargaining table. Every group has the right to take these issues to arbitration.

Cmmr. Gallagher added that the Sheriff's deputies did belong to the Woodworkers Union and then they shifted to the Deputies Guild, which stalled the process. The Board is not sitting at the table. There have been two different Directors sitting at the table. It is in arbitration and when it is resolved the bill will be paid and everyone will move on.

An audience member asked what the process is to change Commissioners' salaries for future terms.

Cmmr. Sheldon stated he would have to ask the County's attorney. The Constitution has a specific provision about cutting elected officials' pay. It is a safeguard and a long standing provision of the Constitution.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson noted that there could also be a salary commission or an adjustment prior to the next election.

Ken VanBuskirk asked about the rural counties sales and use tax. There was a line item for the Belfair Water District for \$200,000 in last year's budget, but it is cut from the new budget.

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Ms. Ehrich stated that the fund was established for rural and sales use tax for economic development. These special funds are controlled by the Commissioners.

Cmmr. Sheldon explained that the County collects about \$600,000 per year, depending on the sales tax that comes in. The money can be used for rural economic development. It has been used for several things.

Mr. VanBuskirk asked if there has been a request from the Belfair Water District for funds this year. He was curious why it was eliminated this year.

Cmmr. Sheldon responded that the process of applying for that money goes through the Economic Development Council. The Economic Development Council lists the priorities in a CEDS list. The project has to be on the list before it receives funding.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson noted that the Economic Development Council presents the CEDS list to the Board for approval. Projects are reviewed in detail by the Economic Development Council.

An audience member asked why \$742,000 is in the budget again for the Hoodspport sewer. She wanted to know why it was in the budget again if it is not being utilized.

Cmmr. Sheldon stated the money isn't just sitting there. Grant funds have been acquired for the Belfair, Hoodspport and Skokomish sewer systems, but there hasn't been enough money pledged to start that project. That money couldn't be used for another purpose.

Emmett Dobey clarified that it is a budgeted amount from grants that cannot be used for anything else. The Hoodspport project has been transferred to the Skokomish Indian Tribe as a financial agent. It will be taken out of the budget at the end of the year.

Annette McGee stated that it doesn't appear that the County is in as bad of shape as what is going on statewide. She also stated that donations or allocations to the Economic Development shouldn't be done if a member of the Board is sitting on the council. The fairgrounds was also done away with, which was suppose to save \$100,000 per year in insurance money. There is not a difference in the insurance allocation next year. Why isn't there a savings there?

Cmmr. Ring Erickson replied that the insurance savings from the fairgrounds was about \$14,000.

Cmmr. Sheldon added that the premiums are from the Risk Pool and adjustments will be made so it won't be the same premium. The County is also saving several hundred thousand dollars a year in administration by divesting the lease.

Ms. McGee commented that the problem is that the Board stated it was a \$100,000 savings in a public meeting. The administration costs at the fairgrounds could have been distributed better. She would like the Board to look in to the conflict of interest issue.

An audience member stated that in 2007, 2008 and 2009 a total of \$91,697 was spent on Human Resources professional services. How is that amount of money justified in not settling the Deputies contracts? That shows a lack of respect.

Cmmr. Sheldon replied that the County has to have representation when two parties negotiate.

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Sheriff Salisbury clarified that the deputies have been working for three years without a contract. January will be the 4<sup>th</sup> year. The deputies have been a guild and been organized, but they switched representation to a group that represents law enforcement. During that time there have been two HR Directors at the County and now there is no HR Director. There is a concern on how the contracts will be paid for when settled. How the contracts are paid for could have detrimental effects on his office.

Lynda Links commented that 80 million dollars of the 2010 budget is under the operational control of the Commissioners. One briefing per week doesn't seem like an enough time lead and direct the department heads. It seems that with the firing of 3 management positions there needs to be more oversight of the departments. Wouldn't it be logical to hire a County Administrator?

Cmmr. Sheldon responded that he thinks the Board needs to hire a budget director/human resources director. Combining those positions would be a wise move.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson added that she doesn't know about a County Administrator, but many counties have their advertised Commission meetings 7-8 hour per day, 5 days per week. At this point the Board doesn't have that kind of schedule. She thinks that since the Board has the salaries that they do, extending that public period, or changing strategies, would be something the Board should look at.

Al Brotche reminded the Board that prior to 1982 the Auditor brought forward a balanced budget for the consideration of the Board. The County Auditor has done that again this year. Why do we need to hire a budget director when the only state mandated financial officer is the County Auditor? Would the Board of County Commissioner consider centralizing accounting with oversight by the Auditor and the Finance Committee? He worked in County government for 29 years and observed that there is a whole bunch of accounting clerks that are not professional accountants. He would like the Board to consider eliminating a budget director and to centralizing accounting. It will save money.

Cmmr. Sheldon stated that he needs one person, working for the Commissioners, to work on special funds. The Board needs to track special funds and make sure someone is responsible for each fund. Someone needs to look at the accumulated leave fund. There also needs to be someone to work on projections. He finds it hard to believe that Mason County is in better shape than the State. Obligations come up each day that weren't anticipated. The Auditors office shouldn't be taxed with all of the responsibility.

An audience member asked where the money to pay for lawsuits come from.

Cmmr. Sheldon replied the County does have insurance, but there are things that aren't insured.

Sandra Herndon commented that she understands the Commissioners are the fiscal managers for the County. There has been a lot of talk about the deputies' contracts being an unknown factor in the future. There is no hard information yet, but it seems a worst case scenario should be anticipated. There should be a Plan B.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson responded that historically these settlements have not come out of the department's budgets. They have come out of the ending fund balance. There is a revolving line of credit that could be utilized. There are anticipated ways that it can be taken care of, but until the Board knows the number they can't take action.

Ms. Swartos asked if there could be a workshop to discuss the possibility of a Human Resources Director, Budget Director or County Administrator. Before decisions are made it would be good to evaluate where the County has already been and what didn't work.

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Cmmr. Ring Erickson noted that she thinks the Auditor has done a wonderful job. For the first time she has finally got her questions answered.

Ms. Ehrich stated that the budget is based on real numbers. It isn't a rosy picture, but it is balanced.

An audience member asked if the contract, when settled, wouldn't come out of the Sheriff's budget.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson stated that is what has been done historically. She wouldn't vote to do that.

Cmmr. Sheldon commented that the budget as presented already has a cut to the Sheriff's department.

Rosalyn Reed asked when positions are eliminated, such as the County Administrator's, how is it determined that those duties are adequately represented somewhere else.

Cmmr. Sheldon replied that the Administrator's position was eliminated in 2005. The duties were distributed to department directors and staff.

Ms. Reed asked how the citizens would be assured that a County Administrator's duties would represent what the County needs.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson responded that the Board isn't anticipating hiring a County Administrator in the budget.

An audience asked if there is a plan in place to meet to discuss these numbers? She is concerned that the problem with a middleman is there isn't the same communication and action.

Lisa Frazier stated that the Finance Committee meets quarterly but they can meet anytime. The first six months of the year they were meeting monthly.

Cmmr. Sheldon added that the Board also gets financial reports each week. For example, in January and February of 2009, he noticed that the Department of Community Development was overspending \$10,000 each month. He thought it was important to make some cuts, but there wasn't two votes to make cuts. In the end, money from other funds was moved into the Department. He thinks the revenue projections are optimistic.

Betty Widing asked if there is a list of department cuts that is specific to what was cut and who was cut.

Cmmr. Sheldon responded that the Auditor has that.

Mr. Brotche wondered if the Board had considered a grant administrator as a future source of revenue for the County. If there was a grant administrator responsible for seeking and monitoring grants, they could pay for their own salary.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson replied that it had not been considered in this budget.

Cmmr. Sheldon noted that the Sheriff's office has been very successful in obtain grants. The Health Department and Community Development have also worked hard to find funds. Grant money is getting tougher to get.

Sandy Tarzwell asked if the number reflected in the budget for ER&R is the bottom line needed for that budget.

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Mr. Loser stated that right now the money is being spent that was built up to replace vehicles. The fund could go to zero, but then vehicles would not be replaced. The funds function is solely to replace assets. If that process were stopped it would be detrimental later.

Brenda Hirschi stated that the special funds show a miscellaneous amount of \$107,000 to be spent in 2010. It is labeled miscellaneous and she would like to know what the money is being spent on.

Ms. Ehrich answered that is the Historical Preservation Fund.

Ms. Hirschi stated she would like to know specifically what it is being spent on.

Ms. Ehrich noted that revenue generator is the Auditor's recording fees.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson stated there isn't a plan for the money to be spent, but it is required to be collected. As the County moves into renovation of the interior of the courthouse there would be some hope to use it there.

Ms. Hirschi asked what the plan is to replace the CompuTech financial software.

Mr. Loser stated they have approximately \$90,000-\$100,000 in the technology fund next year, which is enough to put a down payment on a new system. He would like to push that project forward for next year.

Ms. Hirschi asked how the Lodging Tax money would be spent in 2010.

Cmmr. Sheldon stated that the Lodging Tax Advisory Committee will bring their recommendations before the Board. The Board is waiting to hear their proposal. It is a private sector Committee.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson added that in the past the money has been spent on Visitor Information Centers, joint tourism promotion and grants have been given to promotional activities that bring tourism to the area. The group looks at the proposals and makes recommendations to the Board.

Cmmr. Gallagher noted that \$177,941 was requested between the two Chambers. It was approved by the committee and it will be on the consent agenda for the Commissioners approval by the end of the year.

Ms. Hirschi asked that when the recommendations come from the committee it be posted on the website.

Cmmr. Sheldon replied that it should be on the website.

Ms. Hirschi asked about the Mental Health fund. \$200,000 was transferred out and she would like to know if the County has determined the legal authority for placing the leasehold tax dollars into the fund.

Ms. Ehrich stated the State Auditors are looking into the issue and it will be part of their exit interviews.

Ms. Hirschi asked what the expected deliverables are for 2010 for the Oakland Bay Protection District.

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Vicki Kirkpatrick responded that the commitment is for the Health Department to sample 1/3 of Oakland Bay each year so the entire bay will be covered over a 3 year period. The responsibilities for Mason County Public Health are posted online in both the Oakland Bay Clean Water Response Plan and the Oakland Bay Matrix. The Health Department also provides staffing and administrative support to the Oakland Bay Clean Water District Advisory Committee.

Ms. Hirschi asked if the \$285,000 for professional services is what is being paid to the Health Department.

Ms. Kirkpatrick replied that because it is a separate fund, as the staff does the work it is billed against the fund.

Ms. Hirschi stated she couldn't find meeting minutes or reporting in 2009 as to what the money is being spent on.

Ms. Kirkpatrick stated that the matrix is online. There is a special website for the Oakland Bay Clean Water District.

Ms. Hirschi commented that she has heard that there was one dye test and the rest went to County overhead.

Ms. Kirkpatrick responded that is unfortunate because that isn't where the expenditures went.

Ms. Hirschi stated she is shocked by the interfund charges to the WSU Extension and the Health Department. The money is clearly going to overhead.

Ms. Kirkpatrick replied that isn't true. WSU provides educational work to the community and open houses. The Environmental Health Director and herself work to support the advisory committee. There was a mailing to 100% of the homeowners around Oakland Bay regarding septic system requirements for operation and maintenance. There has been more than one sampling. There are overhead charges, but that is not the bulk of the money. The charges are for direct activities. The Oakland Bay Clean Water District is quite busy and intensive. They meet on a monthly basis and work with the State, the Federal government and local stakeholders.

Ms. Hirschi asked how many citizens attended the open houses.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson stated she and Commissioner Gallagher were there and there were many citizens there.

Cmmr. Gallagher added that there were 3 open houses and they were all well attended.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson noted she has also attended the WSU educational workshops there were many citizens there.

Ms. Kirkpatrick added that there have been multiple septic repairs and a lot of effort into the education of the Oakland Bay community

Ms. Hirschi asked how this would be funded in 2011.

Ms. Kirkpatrick replied that she doesn't know yet. They are hoping to find grants.

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Ms. Hirschi asked how the Board is monitoring and integrating the work of the departments for clean water and shellfish protection.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson answered that the Oakland Bay group is a good template. The composition is mainly citizens, State agencies, the shellfish industry and the tribes. It is about bringing together the groups that are interested. Oakland Bay is a unique body of water so the other districts may look different.

Ms. Hirschi stated she isn't implying that everyone isn't working hard and doing what they should. Her question is where is the integration of the County's departments.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson stated that is what she is explaining. It comes together at the table. The departments aren't overlapping. They are working together to get the best value for each dollar.

Bob Simmons noted that the biggest issue is stormwater management. The County department heads meet bi-monthly to look at stormwater management. There are grant funds to sustain some activities for stormwater. These sub-areas, such as Oakland Bay, all fit within that.

Ms. Hirschi asked about North Bay. There is a June 9, 2008 letter from Mason County to the Department of Health that lays out what each of the departments are to do. She would like to know if the tasks have been completed.

Ms. Kirkpatrick replied that they are working with the State Department of Health to do the sampling since there isn't funding for North Bay. They are in the process of pulling together specific responses for each of the items for the Department of Health.

Ms. Hirschi stated the letter shows all of the things the departments will do but it doesn't say when. She would like to see a timeline.

Ms. Kirkpatrick responded that part of the problem is that it is difficult to determine what the cause is at North Bay. The Department of Health acknowledges that and they are looking at upgrading the status to approved next year. It is difficult to pinpoint the specific cause of the pollution that results in the downgrade. North Bay has had this cycle for many years. It's not that they haven't tried. They just don't have the science yet.

Cmmr. Sheldon called a recess at 10:34 a.m. The meeting reconvened at 10:43 a.m.

Ms. Hirschi asked about the accrued leave fund. The total unfunded liability at the end of 2008 was 2.7 million. What is the expected pay out for 2010?

Ms. Ehrich replied that budget was redone. There will be \$60,000 in payouts in 2010. There will also be monthly payments that total \$75,000.

Ms. Hirschi asked what the timeline is for modifying the fund.

Cmmr. Sheldon answered that he believes there needs to be an actuarial study for this fund to see what the obligations are. It needs to be compared to other counties. There have been questions raised about compensatory time. He is still unsure of the policy. This is an item he would charge a Human Resources/Budget person with. It is a special fund that needs examination. In a recession the Board needs to look at all of the options.

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Ms. Hirschi asked if \$200,000 from the abatement repairs and demolition fund has been transferred to DCD.

Ms. Adkins replied no. It is hard to anticipate if money will need to be transferred in 2010.

Ms. Hirschi asked if the money is spent will the public be told what it is spent for.

Ms. Adkins stated if the budget were amended it would go before the public. They currently have the ability to transfer out everything but the \$45,000 that needs to be left in the account. She doesn't believe there would need to be a public process for spending that.

Ms. Ehrich stated that when the budget is set there is money in beginning and ending fund balances. When the money is spent through out the year there doesn't need to be a supplemental process. The abatement fund is in under the purview of the Commissioners and the money could be transferred without a hearing.

Ms. Hirschi asked about trash fee rates. The Olympian stated that increased rates are proposed for Thurston County. Where does Mason County stand regarding rates in 2010?

Mr. Dobey responded that no rate increases are proposed. The revenues are monitored monthly. If there is a continuation of a decrease on trash coming into the landfill adjustments may need to be made to the program later on. The department has budgeted based on a decrease and beyond. It is about 45% less than two years ago.

Ms. Hirschi asked about the Mason Conservation District. She understands that over \$400,000 of a \$5 assessment on property taxes is being held by the County. 66.5% should go to Public Health and 33.5% should go the Conservation District. If this issue is resolved by the courts in 2010, how will the money be spent.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson replied that there was no expectation that it would be the County's money to spend.

Cmmr. Sheldon added that a previous Board made the decision to impose the fee on each parcel. People challenged it and took it to court and it was determined that the fee was not appropriate. The money is being held now and the County is waiting on an appeal. If the courts decide there needs to be a refund to the taxpayers at least the County will have a large portion. It wouldn't be wise to spend the money if the court could direct that it be refunded.

Ms. Hirschi asked if it turns out that the County can spend the money what would it be spent on. There should be a plan.

Cmmr. Sheldon answered that the money could only be spent on specific purposes.

Ms. Hirschi asked if a moratorium has been considered for travel and seminars.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson noted the she has not taken any travel or gas money.

Cmmr. Sheldon stated a moratorium hasn't been imposed but travel has been decreased considerably. If the department directors submitted a budget with unnecessary travel it wouldn't be something the Board would like to see.

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Ms. Hirschi commented that a goal in 2008 was a fairgrounds facility plan. What happened to that goal and how much did that consultant cost?

Cmmr. Gallagher stated times have changed and there is no money now. The Board contracted with Helix and their plan would have cost over 40 million. Foster & Williams was also contracted. Right now everything is on hold.

Charlie Butros explained that the initial conceptual design for the fairgrounds was done by Helix. He doesn't know the exact expenditures to Helix for the design. There were subsequent step to take that design to do an evaluation on reducing the scope of work to bring the cost to a reasonable figure. He doesn't know how far into the process they got.

Ms. Hirschi asked where the plans are now.

Mr. Butros replied that they are in Betty Wing's administration files. They do exist.

Ms. Hirschi asked if there are there expenditure or revenue changes that should be made at this time to preclude supplemental changes in 2010.

Cmmr. Sheldon stated he believes this budget is overestimating revenue. There is a cushion of about \$400,000. He is not optimistic that the recession is a "V" shaped recession. It could be a "W" shape. He believes Mason County's economy needs to be reset and it will be in the shape of an "L". There are factors that will make revenues less than they have been. He believes the budget should be even leaner in anticipation of a continued downturn in the economy.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson asked for Commissioner Sheldon's suggestions for additional cuts.

Cmmr. Sheldon replied that he would look at parks and other non-essential departments. He would not look to Criminal Justice.

Ms. Hirschi commented that she took the cash balance for the months of February 2005 to October 2009 and created a graph. On October 5<sup>th</sup> she was promised she would be given an accounting of where the reserves were spent. She still hasn't gotten that information and she still wants to know what happened to the cash reserves. She would also like to know where the cash balance will be in 2010. Is the County going to dip down in March and how much below the 2009 line will it get?

Cmmr. Sheldon stated it is apparent that the best predictor of where we will be in 2010 is where we have been over the last 5 years. It is a continuous drop. His best guess is that 2010 will also be down.

Ms. Hirschi replied that it is not enough to just have a beginning number and an ending number. She would like to see where the cash balance is plotted out on a monthly basis.

Cmmr. Sheldon stated that is why it would be wise to hire someone to do that in addition to Human Resources.

Ms. Hirschi asked how the County monitors grant funding.

Cmmr. Sheldon responded that each department is responsible for their grant funds. The Auditor's office periodically sends out notices to make sure they keep up on the billings.

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Ms. Hirschi asked if the Commissioners would commit to recording all meetings, briefing or workshops where two or more Commissioners are gathered.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson replied that she is fine with that with the exemption of those things that would need to be excluded.

Cmmr. Gallagher stated he is in favor of that.

Cmmr. Sheldon responded that he has no problem being recorded, but there needs to be provisions. Who would transcribe the briefings if someone wanted a transcript? That could be very expensive.

An audience member asked how the Board takes advantage of recorded testimony now.

Cmmr. Sheldon replied that the Clerk takes minutes and the Board reviews the minutes.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson stated that she takes notes. If she doesn't understand her notes she can request a copy of the Commission meeting video from HCTC.

Ms. Hirschi asked if the Board would commit to giving public notice on the meetings in a more obvious way on the website and to include documents in support of the meeting on the website.

Cmmr. Sheldon stated that would be useful.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson commented that she has a sincere interest in that. Other Counties put out their whole council member packet on the internet a week before the meeting. However, the Board is low on staff right now.

An audience member commented it would be helpful to make a meeting announcement in another forum.

Ms. Hirschi asked about revenue projections regarding property taxes. The elected officials determine the taxes. It is a budget based system. As the Board of Commissioners began to develop the 2010 budget, have they planned on the maximum amount from the taxpayers?

Cmmr. Ring Erickson stated the budget estimates were predicated on a 1% increase.

Dixie Smith added that is what is being done today. Normally the Board does take 1%.

Ms. Hirschi asked what the budget was based on.

Cmmr. Sheldon stated that it would take 2 of the 3 Commissioners to make that vote. Because there is price deflation this year it takes a super-majority to make that determination. There are other jurisdictions that have not taken the 1%. Because this is a 3 member Board, it would take 2 votes to get that 1%. This budget has anticipated that vote.

Ms. Smith stated in the past few years those values haven't gone up. Even though the budget is being increased the levy rates have dropped.

Ms. Ehrich added that property taxes are 8 of the 24 million in the budget.

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Ms. Hirschi stated that budget documents being used by the County are for auditing purposes. Would the Board agree to form a citizens advisory group to create budget documents that accommodate the needs of the citizens?

Cmmr. Ring Erickson commented that was lost a couple of years ago. She is fine with it.

Karen Herr stated that the preliminary budget is the very same as the adopted budget so you can see every change. It is the first time that was ever done.

Ms. Hirschi replied that the documents are for auditors. They are not for regular people to understand how the money is being spent.

Ms. Herr stated she would be happy to sit on a committee.

Cmmr. Sheldon stated it is a fine idea. He appreciates all of the work the League has done on this budget.

Ms. Hirschi clarified that her questions are not sanctioned by the League.

Ms. McGee asked about the reduction to ER&R. She would like to know many vehicles are in Current Expense and Public Works. She urges the Board to review them for elimination. She also urges the Board not to reduce ER&R until they see how many vehicles need to be replaced. She would also like to know if they are all marked vehicles.

Mr. Loser stated that all of the cars are marked except for some in criminal justice.

Cmmr. Gallagher added that Dave Loser did an inventory and listed all of the vehicles. It was his assessment that the County could save \$223,000 by deferring payments and mothballing. That was taken out of the conversation when the \$750,000 was brought up.

Ms. McGee asked about the cars going home.

Cmmr. Gallagher stated that some cars are obligated to go home. Every Sheriff Deputy has a car.

Ms. McGee stated she feels anytime the taxpayers' money is spent it should be done by public hearing. If a resolution is passed in a public hearing it needs to be rescinded in a public hearing. She also asked why a line by line budget isn't adopted instead of a bottom line budget. It would be a good way to manage the County's spending.

Cmmr. Sheldon stated the directors and elected officials cannot spend more than their bottom line. He doesn't want to micro-manage the affairs of another elected official.

Ms. McGee stated that the Commissioners' answer as to why they cannot cut their own salary is only partially true. The Board cannot cut their own salaries when they are in office, but they could provide leadership by not collecting a check from the Auditor.

Cmmr. Sheldon replied that all three Commissioners take their checks, pay the taxes and donate portions of their salaries back to the community.

Ms. McGee asked why the Board doesn't rescind the resolution on the Commissioner salaries. The Board could not accept their full salary to let the people know they are leaders.

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Cmmr. Gallagher stated that the Commissioners work 60-70 hours per week. This is his only job. He totally dedicates his time to the community and this is how he is compensated. Thurston County Commissioners get \$108,000, because it's based on population. The Board works for the County and they all work very hard.

Sheriff Salisbury stated he would like to answer Ms. Hirschi's questions. He is not planning any supplementals. In three years he has been here he has not asked for a supplemental budget. If there is an emergency he would, but he is not anticipating anything right now. The only issue is where the deputies' contracts money is coming from.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson noted the only supplementals the Board sees from the Sheriff's office are grants and things coming from other sources.

Sheriff Salisbury added that their risk management has saved their office of 1 million dollars.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson commented that before Sheriff Salisbury was Sheriff there were a lot of unanticipated gaps in the Sheriff's budget. She appreciates that Sheriff Salisbury has done a good job of not having that happen.

Nancy McMann asked how much the Sheriff had been cut previously in regards to positions.

Sheriff Salisbury stated he lost 9 positions.

Ms. McMann asked if the 1% cut that every department has taken would mean a loss of a deputy.

Sheriff Salisbury replied that a lot of those costs would come out of vehicles and the jail food line budget. Anything other cuts would be a loss of people.

An audience member asked about the Sheriff's contracts as unanticipated expenses. She would like to know if they will come out of the year end balance and if the Board has reason to believe that the ending fund balance will cover the estimates.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson stated that union contracts have historically come out of the ending fund balance. It is a reasonable expectation that the ending fund balance could cover it.

Cmmr. Sheldon commented that he believes the revenues are overstated. It will be very difficult to fund a large award.

Cmmr. Ring Erickson added that she believes there is the capacity to cover the contract between the ending fund balance, the two million dollar revolving loan and possibly a levy shift, without cutting the sheriff's budget.

Ms. Hirschi asked if the Treasurer could speak to what she sees as far as the revenues being correct in the budget.

Mr. Frazier stated the revenues are based on historic collections. Baring a dire emergency, they are pretty accurate. Unless the economy fails significantly the revenues should be on budget.

Ms. Hirschi asked what is different in 2009 compared to 2010. What will make the citizens feel more confident that the revenue projections are accurate?

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Ms. Frazier responded that they have already adjusted to the economy, which was not done in the fall of 2008 when the 2009 budget was prepared.

An audience member asked why the budget wasn't adjusted in 2008. She remembers the Treasurer stating it was going to be a very bad year.

Cmmr. Sheldon replied that this recession isn't like anything the County has experience before. The Commission has balanced the 2009 budget on one time fixes and he doesn't think that's wise. Now in 2010 \$750,000 is being taken from ER&R.

The audience member asked what could be done besides cutting Parks.

Cmmr. Sheldon answered that the Board has to look at the non-essentials and change the budget to a more sustainable level.

An audience member asked why that hasn't happened already. Why is Parks at the same level as the Sheriff's department?

Cmmr. Ring Erickson responded the Parks Department has taken significant cuts, much greater than the Sheriff's department.

Ms. Tarzwell asked why there is such a high rate of return for jury summonses. Can anything be done to address that to save postage?

Ms. Swartos explained that the jury source list is obtained from the Department of Licensing and Voters Registration. It is a merged list and the Secretary of State deletes the duplicates. The Clerk's office cannot pick and choose whom they mail to. They have to mail to everyone on the list. They get a large percentage of returns from street addresses that have no mail receptacle. They have to mail to everyone on the list and they have no control over it.

Ms. Tarzwell asked if the Clerk could update the list.

Ms. Swartos replied that she cannot update the list.

Patsy Robinson added that the District Court does send the returned summonses to the Elections Department for corrections.

Ms. Tarzwell asked if Mason County's rate of return is comparable to other counties.

Ms. Swartos stated it is.

Mr. Brotche asked if the Board is prepared to eliminate County vehicles for personal use, other than the Sheriff and Coroner's.

Cmmr. Sheldon answered that he doesn't know which vehicles are used for County employees to go home. If there are those vehicles it would be prudent to look at that. He doesn't believe it is a large number.

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Public Testimony

Nancy McMann stated she is very concerned that there is no evidence of long term planning for growth and development. There needs to be planning for revenues to increase. Economies don't stagnate. They either increase or decrease. This county is so dependant on the shellfish and timber industries. For the county not to be more diverse is very dangerous. There has been a lot of talk of loss in sales tax revenue. She believes people should spend money in their own area instead of going wherever it is cheaper, but there are a lot of things that they cannot get here. It doesn't make sense economically to not have long range planning. There needs to be 5 and 10 year plans. The county can either grow and expand or remain like it is.

Cmmr. Gallagher commented that the Belfair sewer will generate a lot of business. It is one step to helping the county grow.

Susan Remmele stated she is a long time resident of Maggie Lake in Tahuya. Mason County is comprised of 1,051 square miles, of which 961 square miles is land and the remaining is water. Tahuya is a unique community, being somewhat isolated and almost island-like. They are separated from the rest of the County by Hood Canal and no town knows better how important law enforcement is. They also became blatantly aware of the need for road maintenance when they lost North Shore Road and the bridge over the Tahuya River. They were even more isolated with no way in or out for a couple of days. When there finally was a way out it was a dirt road through an isolated forest with no cell phone reception at all. She is very concerned about a 1% budget cut across the board, which includes the Sheriff's department. Prior to the election of Sheriff Salisbury, Maggie Lake had horrible problems with crime. There is a habitual criminal that resides at the lake when he's not in jail. When the residents called 911 for help it took hours or days to get a response. The general attitude of the residents back then was, why call 911 when they don't do anything anyway. Things have changed since Sheriff Salisbury was elected. They have seen more presence in the community and they are grateful. However, they have already seen one cut the Sheriff's department, which effected manpower, and now another cut. In view of the recent murders of law enforcement officers, one would think that it would be even more important not cut the Sheriff's office. The County is not like a city with most responses in the city limits. It is spread out over 1,051 square miles. Cutting the Sheriff's office can foster a feeling of lack of safety for the deputies. If the Board makes the deputies jobs harder than they already are by cutting their workforce budget, it is possible these valuable assets will be lost to other places where working conditions are better. It is her understanding that the roads department has never been cut and has even been able to hire. She doesn't mean their job is not important, however it seems they need to make better use of manpower. She was a critical care nurse and a firefighter in her working career. For both of those positions life came first in the tiers of importance. Public safety should be first, second should be public health and third should be infrastructure. It seems the Commissioners have it backwards. She hopes the Board's proposal will not cost anyone their lives. She asks the Board not to cut the Sheriff's budget.

Raymond Stutz stated he wants to throw his support to the Sheriff's department. He has been involved in critical events in the past year. Their professionalism has shown through. To see their resources cut to bare bones is heartbreaking. He doesn't want to see Mason County's people suffer.

Margie Benson stated she lives 6 miles from Maggie Lake in a rural area. They have trouble getting police to their area. She urges the Board not to cut the Sheriff's budget. It won't take a deputy but it will increase workloads. 8 sex offenders were just released into the county. 1 deputy handles all of the sex offenders and does several other jobs. She urges the Board not to cut the Sheriff's budget. The citizens voted the Board in because safety is number one. Commissioner Sheldon is listening to what people are saying.

Cmmr. Sheldon called a recess at 12:01 p.m. The meeting reconvened at 1:18 p.m.

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Judge Toni Sheldon stated that the Court has been working with the Sheriff's office for security for the public coming into the courthouse for their hearings. It is an access to justice issue. For example, domestic violence cases have the complaining party and the person being complained about coming to the same room. It is a difficult situation. Thurston County has set up their courtroom so there are two doors for separation. At times people are required to come to court and a secure place needs to be provided. There was a potential incident last week in which a gentleman threatened CPS workers. He was called into court that same week to eliminate his visitation to his children. People are called into court that may be a danger to everyone. There is no money in the 2010 budget for court security. When there is an incident it will be too late. The Sheriff is leaving the courthouse, which eliminates the sense of security of having them in the building. She has asked the Commissioners to advise the Risk Pool that there is no longer law enforcement in the courthouse.

The second item she wanted to note is that recently the Court of Appeals has reversed a 2002 murder conviction and sent it back to the court. The murder allegedly occurred in 2002. It went to trial in 2003 and 9 days into trial the gentleman plead guilty. Now that has been remanded back to the court. They will need funds in the murder fund again. The Commission took a large amount of that fund for general Current Expense. She is concerned that there won't be sufficient funds to pay for this upcoming homicide trial. She advises that there is excess in the indigent defense fund that will roll over into the ending fund balance. She is hoping that the 2010 budget can be amended before it is passed to allow for some of that to go into the special fund for homicide cases.

Cmmr. Sheldon asked how much is needed.

Judge Sheldon explained that she would need to look at what the trial cost the last time and estimate the cost to have all of that testimony transcribed. She will also need to estimate the jury cost. She can get a figure by the end of the week.

Cmmr. Gallagher asked if this is a statewide action.

Judge Sheldon stated it isn't a statewide issue. The gentleman plead guilty and Judge Sawyer sentenced him based upon an incorrect offender score. The Court of Appeals sent it back to the court to sentence him based on a corrected offender score. When that happened he asked to withdraw his guilty plea. Judge Sawyer said no, but the Court of Appeals has said that the gentleman should be able to withdraw his guilty plea.

Roslynne Reed stated she has been on both sides of labor relations. She is concerned about what she has heard and seen throughout the budget cycle in respect to labor. The management side of the 11 County contracts doesn't seem to be aware of the process to facilitate negotiations. The County website shows that 2 contracts expire at the end of the month, 1 expired in 2006 and the others expired in 2008. As a taxpayer, she would be encouraged if when the Board recruits for a new Human Resource Director they ensure that the applicants have labor relations experience. She also understands that the County is paying large sums to a legal firm for labor negotiations, which should have been in the HR Director's responsibilities. The Board doesn't have to like unions, but they must respect the process. The process has been lacking in the County.

Mike Burgwin commented that people get together in groups to protect each other. Now that we are civilized law enforcement does the job for us. He lives at Lake Cushman and they maintain their own roads and water system, yet they pay complete taxes for all County services. Their number one issue is law enforcement because of where they are. In order to get proper law enforcement they pay the Sheriff's office up to \$75,000 per year for a deputy. The deputy has done a great job. He has chased out meth labs and cut the crime rate down to 25% of what it was. The contract states that the deputy

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spends time in Lake Cushman, but if he is needs elsewhere he goes. They are concerned that he will be going a lot more. He likes and uses parks, but in times like these people have to take care of things they need to do. It is not easy, but the nice needs to be cut out and the need should be kept. The need is law enforcement, fire protection and health. Everything else is nice. He urges the Board not to cut the Sheriff's office anymore.

Denny Temple stated he wants to say the same thing as everyone else. Law enforcement cannot be cut at all. This is the time to set priorities. Everyone talked about public safety being the number one priority when they ran for office. People can't even go to coffee. It is dangerous out there. Mandated functions need to be funded. Other things are luxuries. The economy is tough and it's time to make tough decisions. Everyone in the community wants their public safety. The deputies do an excellent job. The Sheriff's department has come a long way in the last few years. The bottom line is that we cannot afford to lose anymore than we have. State Patrol is also being cut and there needs to be bodies out there to protect the public. When making cuts look elsewhere. Give the Sheriff's office the tools to do their job.

Lynda Links stated she wants to talk about what is mandatory and what is not mandatory. Recently the Commissioners fired three managers from their own department. Possibility they will hire a non-mandatory finance director, which duplicates the work of the Auditor. The Auditor is mandated. At the very least the Auditor could use a person back to get work done that is mandated.

Brenda Hirschi thanked the Auditor's financial services for all of their hard work in putting the budget together. It was a great improvement from last year. She had requested an audit trail last year and she thanks the Board for supporting that. In September 2008 she spoke about how difficult it is to understand the budget documents. They are designed for auditing purposes, not regular people. The people need to see where the money comes from, what it is being spent on and what they are getting for it. In the interest of helping to come up with a solution, she would provide a template for a starting point as another way to present the information so it doesn't take an MBA to figure out the budget. She encourages the Board to use the website more to get the documents out early on. After many months of study, she wants to respectfully make an observation. She believes Mason County is being staff driven. In the budget of over 100 million, appointed department heads are managing over 80 million dollars. Week after week the Board provides their schedules. The Board only occasionally holds briefings more than a half of a day. While the department heads are doing their best, the Board was elected to do the financial management. The Boards' role cannot be subcontracted. If things go awry the responsibility cannot be projected upon others. This is the root problem. The Board is not engaged in the management and leadership of the County departmental offices. They also haven't organized the resources under their operational control to provide oversight. Resources under the Board's control include 80% of the money and half of the County staff. The way the County is currently organized it will take more than ½ day per week to provide the needed leadership and oversight. Some concrete examples of what has fallen through cracks are 10 of 11 bargaining units with no signed contract, the number of times the 2009 budget was revised and water quality issues are not resolved. There is concern that the County may be going broke. Rather than taking action to formally reduce the elected officials budgets, the Board just hopes they won't overspend. There is a lack of ratings and reviews for employees performance. There is also the surprise of the unfunded liability of the accrued leave fund. She could go on and on. Something must be done. The current situation requires quick response. This time next year she will be back here and she will want to know what the citizens are getting for the dollars they are providing.

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Karen Herr, Auditor, commented regarding the lunch hour closure the Assessor, Auditor and Treasurer's offices started last week. She stated that all last week she spent her lunch hour talking to each person that came to her office to do business who was turned away. The majority of the customers realized the offices have inadequate staffing. She understands it is a huge inconvenience to the citizens. The Assessor, Treasurer and herself would like to restore staffing to be able to resume normal hours in January. They have asked for less than \$50,000 to fund three part time positions to cover the lunch hour. At the end of the November the Auditor's office has expended only 84% of their budget, because every employee took leave without pay, she returned a weeks salary, they didn't fill a position and they had a retirement. The office will be rolling over approximately \$100,000 at the end of the year and she is asking that a portion of that be used to fund the three positions.

Terry Hull stated that it is apparent there are some tough decisions to make and he would like to talk about the need for support for the Washington State University Extension Program. His organization, Shorebank Cascadia, provides loans to people in the community to fix their septic systems. They have developed a strong partnership with staff and the Extension program. They depend on the educational efforts that the Extension makes. It is that partnership that has allowed them to help homeowners that need financial assistance. As the Board looks at the difficult decisions he would like them to keep in mind the educational efforts that support the work he does.

Steve Bloomfield stated that he also wanted to speak about education opportunities. His job is predicated on water quality. The bang for the buck isn't spending it after the water quality has deteriorated. Having the Health Department sitting on reactive panels isn't an efficient use of money. The best way to solve water quality issues is through education. The WSU Extension water quality program and the 4-H are essential to teaching children at a younger age about water quality. This is a black and white issue. Either it's done right or we react to it. The WSU Extension gives the opportunity to do it right.

Nancy Moran stated that she understands that public safety is a great concern and she is thankful for all of the officers that serve to protect the citizens. She hopes the Commissioners and public realize the return on the small investment that is made to the WSU Extension. The County provides just \$109,000 and through that the Extension is able to facilitate over \$850,000 of grants to go back into the community.

Annette McGee thanked Brenda Hirschi for what she has done to alert people to what is going on with the budget. She would also like to thank the Board for allowing this morning's questions. She is asking the Board to take leadership in management and not take their full salary to fund the deputies missing from the Sheriff's office. It would go a long way to at least partially funding one deputy. She is hearing that the Board is going to hire a Human Resources Director again and a Finance Director again. The county already has the best Finance Director with the Auditor's office. The Board should be the Human Resource Director. If the Board doesn't want to cut their own salary they should earn it by being the HR Director.

There was no further public testimony.

Cmmr. Sheldon noted that he would like to have an evening meeting for citizens to be able to come in who work during the day. He would like to be able to continue this.

**Cmmr. Gallagher/Ring Erickson moved and seconded to continue the public hearing on the 2010 Mason County Budget to December 8, 2009 at 6:00 p.m. Motion carried unanimously. RE-aye; S-aye; G-aye.**

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4. Adjournment – The meeting adjourned at 1:53 p.m.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
MASON COUNTY, WASHINGTON

\_\_\_\_\_  
Tim Sheldon, Chair

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Lynda Ring Erickson, Commissioner

\_\_\_\_\_  
Shannon Goudy, Clerk of the Board

\_\_\_\_\_  
Ross Gallagher, Commissioner