
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS SPECIAL WORK SESSION
3:00pm, CBAB, 601 State Street, Hood River, OR - 1st Floor Conference Room

MINUTES

Chair Oates called the special work session to order. Present: Commissioners Benton, McBride, Joplin, Perkins, Counsel Davies and Administrator Hecksel

Strategy 360 – Amy Ruiz, Review Ballot Measures & Possible Modifications

Chair Oates welcomed Amy Ruiz with Strategy 360 –

Amy gave an overview of her firm and where her focus is working with public agencies on ballot measures construction. She has reviewed the measures and campaign that took place at the May election and asked the commission

Chair Oates asked her opinion on when she feels would be a good time to back out for a measure if the commission decides that is the direction they want to go.

Amy stated she would not recommend going back out this November because you will have the same voters. She would go next year at the earliest because she feels we need more time on the process to get more specific where the funds would be used and get more specific on the consequences of a no vote. Does not feel that it was clear what would happen if the vote did not pass. Does not feel you need to make the cuts right now because it can be hard to come back from that.

You get a different electorate next year with the Presidential election. Talked about waiting until the November 2020 election.

Oates said that with the promotion we just put out feels that is still in the minds of the citizens and we are running out of time to get something done without having to make significant cuts. Asked if he is wrong. Amy said she doesn't feel we would get a different result by going back out in November 2019. Decoupling the tax measures would help. Doesn't feel you have enough time between now and Nov. 2019 to get people to change their minds.

Joplin – asked if Amy could provide info on her review of what we did last time and spend time on changing language of what we did to make the ask clearer and something she feels would work. Joplin talked about the community forums and the results of those.

Amy – You need to show the **urgency** of the need and be **honest** of what you need. Be **specific** on what you are asking the voters to invest in.

Specific on what the impacts will be if the measure(s) do not pass.

Amy said the measures were too vague and at the same too much info. It needs to be simplified and provide clear examples of what will happen if the measures do not pass. What does it really mean. 1-2 impactful facts. The measures and where you are putting the money will need to be precise and limited.

Joplin asked if Amy feels that if we didn't have the sales tax the property levy would have passed. Amy stated that when you have active opposition and people are not in favor of one it is easier for voters to vote no on both.

Joplin asked what Amy felt about the figure, does she have a provision. Amy: be clear and consistent with the messages.

Joplin – asked if Amy had a sense of based on the number that would deter the commission to asking more than the 89 cents if they go back out.

Amy said research is always great with a poll but you can also do a community survey on-line asking what the priorities are and asking what they would not like to see cut. Provide several value levels to select from to gauge their comfort level.

Target stakeholder outreach – ask the food & beverage folks what they could get behind. If you do another poll or survey, ask open ended questions – if they would vote no then why?

McBride – has heard that we need to refine the message and focus on the real impact and then when that does or doesn't happen there needs to be an action taken. His difficulty is that during the budget cycle we have a list of choices and when we talk about those things being cut if we don't get additional funding. It is complex list and a large list. Difficult for him to understand how we are going to nail it down to what will be cut. We don't have the luxury on what will be cut in one or two areas we have a list of 42 options for cuts.

Amy said you might have 20 specifics but then you detail what that means, and it might be that only 2-3 areas are really important to the citizens.

McBride – we have been borrowing money to make ends meet and some people say just keep doing that and there was a lot of resistance from the community that the commissioners will not do anything (cuts) and feels we painted ourselves into a box. Feels that is difficult to get over that hurdle. Amy stated that specificity on cuts and clear statements will help with that message.

Joplin wants to look at the ballot summary for the levy and review the categories that are listed. Asked Amy to provide advice on what to pull out and how to address the specificity.

For example, animal control – what do we have now and would we have if the measure doesn't pass.

Amy stated you need to explain what would be gained and what would be lost and it only works if the messaging is clear.

Hecksel – asked Amy if she felt there were any circumstance where she feels it would be worth while taking the food & beverage tax back out again? Amy- it is hard to say but you will likely have a funded opposition campaign but unless you start with numbers it is hard to determine that.

The Commissioners allowed departments to comment and or ask questions.

Kim Kean stated she heard people throughout the election asking why the county and city cannot combine services and pay for services that way and there were no answers provided by the city or commissioners. Feels that should be addressed.

Amy said that could be addressed in a FAQ for example. Having a shared set of facts would be helpful.

Brian Beebe – said he heard Amy say that we don't have to sell something to get it to passed we need to just let people know what services will be lost and it can be about maintaining services. Amy said absolutely.

Amy stated what would be useful is to dig into the demographics of the voters in the May election and you can determine that from the voter file – you will be able to find out who turned out but it will not show how they voted.

Joplin asked again Amy's thoughts on the best time to go back out.

Amy said you need a broader participation – younger folks tend to be ok with tax increases overall. The May 2020 election will have a lot of energy and the Nov 2020 will have the votes that you need. However, the May election could have more, but you should look at past primary presidential elections to get a better feel for participation counts.

Other things to consider would be what else will be on the Nov 2020 ballot?

The Commissioner thanked Amy Ruiz for her time and information.

Review Vacant Positions

Jeff Hecksel indicated the information provided shows the positions that are currently open but some of them might not be able to be filled if they are general fund because of the possibility they might be cut. We have advertised for some of the listed position and have not received applications.

Benton – except for Community Development – until we go through the process of prioritization, he is not seeing why we would fill any positions at this time. Feels the Corrections and Public Works positions needs to be funded. There are impacts that would come with not filling the appraiser position and we should realize those impacts right now.

Hecksel said that bumping in the union contracts will need to be dealt with when a position is eliminated. Benton clarified that he is talking about not filling a vacant position.

Hecksel said that even if we don't fill a position that might not mean we save money because we have not made service cuts and we will need to continue to perform those functions.

Beebe stated that if the R&A positions are not filled the CAFFA grant is in jeopardy (approx. \$200K) because the grants is contingent upon having the positions noted on the grant application. Noted that CAFFA funding also hits Budget & Finance.

Benton is not sure how address that issue. The position is “funded” he is just saying to not fill it until the prioritization process is gone through. Specifically, the GF fund positions.

McBride said engage these questions first and identify the position will be support in the future to provide direction to staff.

Hecksel said that there might be positions that open in the GF that we leave open for a few months because of your peak work load which will save some money then you work to fill it later in the year.

Benton asked for the commissioners to be kept updated on what positions are vacation and where they are at in the hiring process and where their funding comes from, i.e. general fund, special revenue etc. He is concerned with filling opening positions that are GF funded on a regular basis while we go through the prioritization period, not sure why we would do that.

Review Services Prioritization Exercise

Hecksel – the prioritization exercise goes part in parcel with the positions you fill when they open. Currently we have the choices list but a service prioritization list would mean more that is developed by the commission. Priorities at the bottom of the list would likely not be filled.

Joplin doesn't feel we can do any hiring – she is in favor of a hiring freeze based on the completed prioritization list that will be developed. Benton agrees.

Kim Kean – stated that bringing in temps is not a solution, it takes time to train individuals on how to help the citizens. We have a big election coming up in 2020. Benton said that input is valuable and if we are going to start not filling positions it will be a restructure of the county not just a cut across the board. He has not doubt that the impacts are big in the departments.

Joplin said if we do not have additional funding the service levels will shrink to meet the staffing levels. Kean said it is not just a lack of someone to answer the phone and answer questions it will result in a lack of revenue for the county because there will not be staffing to adequately input personal property returns which put approximately \$1M onto the tax rolls each year.

Hecksel stated he provided an outline of the proposed process for the prioritization exercise in the packet. The set up to get the process started takes time on the part of the staff to identify the services and impact for loss of services. Once the priorities have been determined the list is reviewed every few years to ensure they are still true. Hecksel said it is a great tool for priority-based budgeting.

Oates asked for next steps. Hecksel said he is looking for concurrence from the Commission that they are comfortable with the process outlined and if he gets the ok to move forward he will get the department started on the work they need to do.

Joplin asked if the budget committee should be involved, she feels it would make sense. Perkins and Benton said we could invite them to the meetings, but this is a policy decision and feels that it is not appropriate for the budget committee to weigh in on this part of the process. McBride agrees we need to identify our priorities and the committee then weighs in on the process during budget time.

McBride – stepping back to the issue with open positions and how to deal with them right now. We have already budgeted these positions in the GF and funds are allocated. We have not gone through the prioritization of services and so we do not know the decisions that will be made. He doesn't believe it is time to have a whole sale stop and not allow depts to move forward because we haven't done our homework yet. Feels that until we go through this process it is an emotional response to not hire open positions. We have not given the departments any different guidance to not move forward with the tasks at hand until we have the discussion of what services are a priority to us or not. He is not comfortable inserting ourselves in to the current hiring process the county has established right now.

Benton doesn't disagree with what he said but he wanted to have the discussion of not hiring. He didn't want to bring someone on if that position will not be here in a year.

Hecksel asked if the Commission wants to talk about a money measure at the July work session or do you want to talk more about where you want to go with that. Agreed that the July 15, 2019 work session will be about future money measures.

Benton and McBride stated they don't feel going back out with funding measures in November 2019 would be beneficial. More work needs to be done before another ask is put forward if that is what the Commission decides to do.

Perkins says both experts are saying the same thing. Still concerned that since we had two measures one could pass in November, but both of these folks know what they are doing and we should heed that message.

Joplin – we need to talk with other community partners and see if anyone has plans to put something on the Nov. 2020 ballot. Joplin will not be at the July 15th meeting. She would lean to May 2020 if there is time to do the community vetting work. Benton asked if that is a paid service. Joplin feels that yes that would take money for someone to do a community survey.

Benton asked that between now and July 15th can we get cost on doing a community service. Hecksel said in the 2017 the cost was \$15K, 300 sample size and 10-minute survey. Benton said Ruiz made reference to an on-line survey.

Discuss Future Tax Measure(s)

Will be discussed further at the July 15th work session.

Future of County Forest Trails System will also be discussed at the July 15 work session.

