

BEFORE THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
FOR COLUMBIA COUNTY, OREGON

In the Matter of Calling an Election to)
Consider the Columbia County Jail Local) ORDER NO. 9-2024
Option Tax Levy for Four Years)

WHEREAS, the old Columbia County Jail was built in 1969, and was designed to hold a maximum of 39 prisoners, but was frequently overcrowded, and as a result arrestees often had to be released into the community after booking and before arraignment, prisoners had to be released into the community before their sentences were served, and there was constant fear of litigation over the unsatisfactory conditions in the jail; and

WHEREAS, on November 3, 1998, the electors of Columbia County approved a measure authorizing the issuance of bonds to finance the construction of a new County jail and related law enforcement facilities; and

WHEREAS, the new Columbia County Jail and Justice Facility was completed in January 2001, and is designed to house up to 255 prisoners; and

WHEREAS, the cost to operate the new jail and supervise a greater number of prisoners was unknown at the time the electors authorized its construction, but it was obvious that it would be much greater than operating and staffing the old jail; and

WHEREAS, even though it was known the cost of operating and staffing the jail would increase, the Sheriff and Board promised to run the new jail for at least a year without additional funding to determine the minimum amount of new funds which would be necessary; and

WHEREAS, in order to temporarily run the new, much larger facility and supervise about four times as many inmates without additional funds, the Sheriff and Board promised to try to raise as much money as possible through bed rentals to agencies such as the US Marshals Service, save money by shifting road deputies into the jail to assist the regular correctional deputies, and temporarily shift additional County General Fund money into the Sheriff's Office and Jail budgets; and

WHEREAS, the amount of revenue that can realistically be expected from bed rentals to other agencies has now been established; and

WHEREAS, the County General Fund can no longer fund the operation of the Jail in sufficient amounts to keep more than 25 local inmates in the Jail without a tax levy; and

WHEREAS, in 2014, Columbia County voters approved a levy of \$.05797/\$1000.00 of assessed value for Jail operations; and

WHEREAS, in 2017, Columbia County voters approved a renewal of the levy for four years; and

WHEREAS, in 2020, Columbia County voters approved a renewal of the levy for an additional four years; and

WHEREAS, the General Fund and bed rentals have supported operations for 23 years; and

WHEREAS, the General Fund has experienced a significant decrease in the last decade and cannot fully support Jail operations without a levy; and

WHEREAS, General Fund support for the Jail has remained consistent since the 2014 levy; and

WHEREAS, during the pandemic Federal bed rentals decreased substantially and the cost to run the Jail substantially increased; and

WHEREAS, the Jail has used reserve funds to cover its costs since 2020 and reserves are now depleted to a point that they can no longer be used to bridge the operating budget gap; and

WHEREAS, the proposed tax levy of \$.87/\$1000 would raise approximately \$5,569,309 in Fiscal Year 2024-2025, \$5,804,458 in Fiscal Year 2025-2026, \$6,049,535 in fiscal Year 2026-2027, and \$6,604,960 in Fiscal Year 2027-2028; and

WHEREAS, the estimated total outlay over the four-year renewal period is approximately \$23,728,262; and

WHEREAS, the purposes for which the funds to be provided by the proposed local option tax are to be expended would be to retain 100 jail beds for the local jail population; provide sufficient staffing to manage jail population, provide for maintenance, and provide constitutionally adequate food, clothing, and health care to inmates; and

WHEREAS, the period of time authorized by the electors pursuant to ORS 280.060(3) would be four years;

NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED as follows:

1. An election shall be held on Tuesday, May 21, 2024, to consider the Columbia County Jail Local Option Tax Levy at the rate of \$0.87/\$1000.00 of assessed value for four (4) years. The Columbia County Clerk is hereby directed to publish the ballot title and place the question of the proposed local option tax levy before the electors of Columbia County on the May 21, 2024, election ballot.

2. The purpose for which the funds to be provided by the proposed local option tax levy are to be expended would be exclusively for operating the Columbia County Jail.

3. The rate for this operating fund is \$0.87 per \$1000 of assessed value, approximately \$87 to the owner of a \$100,000 home. (The estimated money raised will be \$5,569,309 in Fiscal Year 2024-2025, \$5,804,458 in Fiscal Year 2025-2026, \$6,049,535 in Fiscal Year 2026-2027, and \$6,604,960 in Fiscal Year 2027-2028, with an estimated total outlay over the four-year renewal period of \$23,728,262.)

4. The period of time authorized by the electors pursuant to ORS 280.060(3) would be four (4) years.

5. The proposed taxes are outside the limitation imposed by Section 11(3), Article XI of the Oregon Constitution.

6. The Board of County Commissioners adopts and approves the ballot title and explanatory statement which are attached hereto, and incorporated herein by this reference.

DATED this 20 day of March, 2024.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
FOR COLUMBIA COUNTY, OREGON

By: [Signature]
Casey Garrett, Chair

By: [Signature]
Kellie Jo Smith, Commissioner

By: [Signature]
Margaret Magruder, Commissioner

Approved as to form

By: [Signature]
Office of County Counsel

Notice of Measure Election

County

Notice		
Date of Notice March 20, 2024	Name of County or Counties Columbia	Date of Election May 21, 2024

Final Ballot Title The following is the final ballot title of the measure to be submitted to the county's voters. The ballot title notice has been published and the ballot title challenge process has been completed.

Caption 10 words which reasonably identifies the subject of the measure.

Jail Operating Tax Levy

Question 20 words which plainly phrases the chief purpose of the measure.

Shall Columbia County levy a tax of \$0.87/\$1000.00 of assessed value for four years beginning in FY2025 for Jail operations? This measure may cause property taxes to increase more than three percent.

Summary 175 words which concisely and impartially summarizes the measure and its major effect.

In 2014, 2017, and 2020 voters approved a jail operating levy, expiring in 2024.

The three primary funding sources for the Jail are the County's General Fund, Federal bed rentals, and the Jail Operating Tax Levy. Since 2014 the County's general Fund support for the Jail has remained consistent. However, during the pandemic Federal bed rental revenue substantially decreased and the cost to run the jail substantially increased. Jail medical costs alone increased from \$634,278 in FY19-20 to \$1,500,000 in FY24-25. The Jail has been forced to use reserve funds to cover costs since 2020. The Jail cannot fully operate without a new rate of \$.87/\$1000.

Prior to the 2014 Levy, the County was forced to reduce Jail beds for local inmates to 25 and anticipated a full closure of the Jail without the Levy. The tax Levy at a rate of \$.87/\$1000 will pay for continued operation of the Jail through FY2027-2028, including funding for constitutionally required food, clothing, management, and healthcare for adults in custody.

The estimated money raised will be \$5,569,309 in FY 2024-2025, \$5,804,458 in FY 2025-2026, \$6,049,535 in FY2026-2027 and \$6,604,960 in FY 2027-2028, for a total estimated tax Levy of \$23,728,262.

Explanatory Statement 500 words that impartially explains the measure and its effect.

If the county is producing a voters' pamphlet an explanatory statement must be drafted and attached to this form for:

- any measure referred by the county governing body; or
- any initiative or referendum, if required by local ordinance.

Explanatory Statement Attached? Yes No

Authorized County Official Not required to be notarized.

Name Casey Garrett	Title Chair
Mailing Address 230 Strand, Room 20, St. Helens, Oregon 97051	Contact Phone 503-397-3839

By signing this document:

- I hereby state that I am authorized by the county to submit this Notice of Measure Election; and
- I certify that notice of receipt of ballot title has been published and the ballot title challenge process for this measure completed.



3.20.2024

Signature

Date Signed

**COLUMBIA COUNTY
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT FOR COUNTY VOTERS' PAMPHLET**

Ballot Title Caption: Columbia County Jail Operating Tax Levy

Measure Number (if known): _____ Word Total (500 Max): **457**

Statement

In 1998, county voters approved a bond levy to construct a new Jail. The bond to build the new Jail was repaid in 2018. Property taxes collected to pay the bond are no longer being collected. The Jail is now 23 years old. Until 2014, Jail operations were primarily funded by the County General Fund and Jail bed rentals. However, by 2012, Jail operations became difficult to fund due to several years of decreases in the County's General Fund due to loss in federal timber funding. From 2012 to 2014, the County reduced the number of adults in custody (AICs) housed at the jail to lower operating expenses. The County force-released hundreds of AICs annually: 582 AICs were released in 2012, 791 in 2013, and 748 in 2014. Jail operations became unsustainable in 2014 and full closure of the Jail was planned. However, in 2014 voters approved a three-year Jail operating tax levy of \$0.5797 per \$1,000 of assessed property value, allowing the County to keep the Jail open. The tax levy was renewed by voters in 2017 and 2020. The tax levy will expire in 2024. Since passing this tax levy in 2014, the County has not force-release AICs. In 2023, the County booked 2,392 AICs into the Jail.

Since 2019, the Jail has experienced steady growth in operational costs, including significant increases in medical and mental health costs (\$634,278 in FY 19-20 to \$1,500,000 in FY 24-25) and food service costs (\$372,650 in FY 19-20 to \$524,001 in FY 24-25). In addition, Jail bed rental revenue decreased substantially from 2020-2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this period the County used reserve funds to bridge budget deficits and reserves are now depleted.

Income streams for the Jail include revenue from the General Fund, bed rentals to outside agencies, and Jail Operating taxes. The Board of County Commissioners has resolved to contribute 1 million dollars annually for Jail Operations. The County has renegotiated bed rental per-diem rates from \$92 to \$127 per night. The County is proposing a Jail Operating tax levy at \$0.87 per \$1,000 of assessed property value for four years to bridge the remaining gap for full operation of the Jail through FY2028.

The tax levy will contribute to constitutionally required care for inmates, including food, clothing, health care, corrections deputies, and other corrections staff, in addition to facility maintenance and deferred capital projects, such as a roof replacement. The use of operating funds will continue to be monitored by a citizen committee established by the County (the "JOCAC"). In addition, the County will annually audit the use of tax levy funds for jail operations.

A property owner with an assessed value of \$100,000 would pay \$87.00 annually for four years. ☒


Person responsible for the content of the Explanatory Statement:

Casey Garrett

Columbia County Board of County Commissioners, Chair

(Name: TYPED)

Position

X 

3/20/24

(Name: SIGNED)

Date signed

Instructions

- The explanatory statement shall be typed.
- Word total: not to exceed 500 words.
- Signature: signed by the person responsible for the content of statement and to include the name of the governing body that person represents.
- Deadline: The statement filing deadline is the same deadline date as that of filing the Notice of Measure election (5pm)
- Note: The county clerk shall reject any referred measure submitted without an explanatory statement