

Securing Our Safety

We want your input to create:

"A Citizen-voiced plan to provide for a secure, stable and sustainable Josephine County"

www.SecuringOurSafety.org



January 10, 2016

Josephine County Residents SOS Committee Captains and SOS Volunteers

Re: The State of the County's Safety and SOS, 2015-2016

Dear valued SOS volunteers and Josephine County residents,

Thank you for your hard work over the last year. Looking back at 2015 we have much to celebrate and probably needless to say we also have a lot of work ahead to fulfill our mission and help JoCo get back on its feet.

We can celebrate the Grace Roots (MAT-C, Medically Assisted Treatment Center) moving closer to becoming a reality thanks to the hard work of that team. They have split off as their own nonprofit (in process) and thanks to the hard work of many volunteers are well on their way to bringing our community a way to treat opiate drug addictions. This will not only help people overcome their opiate addictions, but it will have a positive impact on crime in the County.

We can celebrate the GP Sobering Center, under construction now and scheduled to go into operation in early 2016. This separate nonprofit was formed shortly after SOS came together in 2012 and they did a great job turning an idea into a reality. While it will be heavily used in GP, if OSP or the Sheriff's office agree to the terms of use they can also use this facility as needed. This will be another tool to impact crime in our community and help clean up certain problems in a cost effective way. Congrats to the GP Sobering Center for their successes.

Timber efforts are underway and we have some talented people leading the charge there. On the timber side for County owned lands, the County is moving closer to being able to do more timber harvesting having contracted for its first timber inventory in many many years. We're hearing we're moving closer to boosting County revenues by doing more sustainable harvests on County lands. This could potentially provide a boost to the County by up to ½ million more dollars per year to the bottom line compared to what we have today and we should support the timber advocates and others when they push to use those extra funds for public safety. Like Grace Roots and the Sobering Center, much of the work going on here happens outside of regular SOS meetings and is moving forward just fine without the need for much help from the general SOS membership.

In the long-term, the "hard rock" type of mining holds as much, if not more, economic benefits to the community and directly to the County (as compared to timber) and we have made progress in that arena as well. We held our second mining summit (SOS was one of many sponsors of

this event held at the fairgrounds) and really opened some local eyes on the resource and industry potential. Some of our members are working behind the scenes with private companies to revive this industry. Everything we use and consume in this world is either mined or grown, and our County is rich in natural resources on every front. We just need to harvest these resources in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way for a huge win-win in our County. As a side note, we also know that our County's geology contains a somewhat rare metal called tellurium that is used in technology applications such as certain types of solar cells, semiconductors, and other technology applications. We, meaning both private companies and in partnership with the State and County, should find a way to study the viability of tellurium production along with production of other high value metals we already know can be produced here. Since the County is certainly not in the mining business, it should look to partner with private companies to responsibly develop properties the County already owns. Again, efforts in mining developments to help our County are ongoing and this is happening outside and on its own track without needing resources from the general SOS membership. Anyone interested in any of our committees are always welcome to [email committee captains](#) and offer assistance.

On the fundraising side, our two marquee events, the Art Auction and Run for the Law both had another great year and we look forward to those events being successful again in early 2016. We would call those events a well-oiled machine and thanks to everyone that helps make those awareness and fundraising events a success. We can spend more of our time throughout the year on our core mission thanks to the success of these events.

If you've noticed a trend so far in this report, we hope you've noticed that these balloons are mostly "up in the air" so to speak, and are doing great as they've formed their own volunteers and leadership processes. We still need to engage the membership and citizens as needed, but we can celebrate these successes.

Now when it comes to financial measures that have the ability to restore the former timber and federal timber dollars that used to fully fund our County law enforcement and criminal justice system, there is much work to be done. In a nutshell, we have to find a replacement for at least \$8 million per year of funding that has been lost, and that amount may be closer to \$12 million per year come June 30, 2017, when the last of the federal timber (Secure Rural Schools) dollars are set to expire. According to influential members of our congressional delegation such as Walden, he sees no path to additional federal funds. In our opinion, we don't need to cry wolf because we're already in crisis today and we can focus on the funding crisis that already exists. But just know that at this time the odds are that this crisis gets worse in about 18 months and we need to consider planning for the worst.

We're not saying we should design a financial measure that plans for the worst. But as we've known ever since the crisis started in 2012 that to solve this problem it will take a variety of solutions to bring our County back to a good spot. There is no single silver bullet here, and we've intentionally worked in a variety of ways to help get our County back on its feet because there is no single silver bullet that everyone can support.

SOS has held two public meetings in the last part of 2015 focusing on asking our local leaders and citizens what they think we should do about the crisis at hand. We took many notes and documented all the main comments from these forums (one was in Grants Pass and one was in Cave Junction). There are many great comments that we can focus on in the coming year, but

right now we want to focus on the main themes that came out of those meetings. This isn't everything we heard, but the main themes we heard from you were as follows:

- Keep pursuing the lottery local control initiative effort
- The "\$2 bill" holds a lot of promise and should be pursued
- Economic development / jobs needs to be pursued
- Tax Marijuana (it's here whether we like it or not)

We all agree that pursuing economic development efforts will go a long way towards helping the overall health of our Community. Nobody in their right mind would speak against prudent economic development efforts. But since that alone won't supply additional funding directly to our criminal justice system to replace former federal dollars we would like to focus the rest of this report on the most commonly favored financial measures that can make an impact on this law enforcement funding crisis. In addition, over the last two years we've heard numerous stories about major employers passing on our County or expanding in Josephine County due to our lack of law enforcement services. **We won't have the environment to most successfully foster true economic development efforts until we restore at least a minimum acceptable level of law enforcement and justice services in Josephine County.**

Marijuana is such a divisive issue (and doesn't have the ability of bringing in a significant amount of revenues since there are state legal restrictions on how the tax works) that we suggest SOS shouldn't touch the Marijuana tax discussion. There is already a significant state marijuana tax in place, and the County should receive a small amount of revenue sharing from that existing tax (probably less than \$200k per year). And the City of Grants Pass voters are set to weigh in on whether they want to allow dispensaries in November of 2016. The current State tax laws and restrictions on marijuana taxes and pending votes in Grants Pass this year suggest to us that there are not significant benefits to our law enforcement crisis by pursuing marijuana tax efforts in the coming year. But citizens should be aware that absent state law changes, the taxes our County can bring in on taxing marijuana will only make up around one to two percent of local law enforcement funding needs. **The revenue sharing with Counties from the state tax is already part of state law and we just need to make the public aware that while every little bit helps with this crisis, marijuana taxes are not the answer to our County's law enforcement funding crisis.**

It's also interesting to note that very few County residents are suggesting another countywide local financial measure at this time. So that leaves the Lottery Local Control initiative and the "\$2 bill."

Some of our members have continued to try and pay close attention to the "citizens' voices" out there through social media, conversations, and otherwise. The general mood out there from some informal information gathering can be summarized as follows:

- People are generally very upset at the rise in crime related activity in our county that is not getting attention from law enforcement, and even more upset when they can't get the proper quick response from OSP / County law enforcement when they call for service.
- Typically not much time goes by between social media posts on popular local chat groups such as "here is a picture of my car, it was stolen last night, please be on the lookout for it"

- People generally understand we have public safety challenges (how can you not know this after 4 major County Law Enforcement votes 4 years in a row right?) but many are not yet relating the crime problems directly back to the law enforcement financial crisis.
- When other members post something on social media about “this is why we need to approve a financial measure for public safety / law enforcement,” the No New Taxes attitude is still prevalent despite the rising crime incidents affecting our residents. Many make comments like “they should live within their budget,” “they need to harvest more timber,” “they need to sue the feds for breach of contract,” “they should tax marijuana” or “they should not be banning marijuana” or “we don’t trust the County Commissioners and we can’t approve anything that gives the Commissioners more money.” In other words, lack of trust and to some extent lack of information in regards to the actual financial challenges that are being faced now is still a major challenge for Josephine County. After all, nearly two-thirds of the revenue that formerly supported County law enforcement services has been taken away and **the County IS living within their budget, which is why we don’t have adequate law enforcement services at the County level today.** We know our County has a revenue problem, not a spending problem, but this is not the common public perception out there.

Here is one more anecdotal example of the challenge we’re facing from the public’s “perception” of this issue that was recently observed on social media. Last month you may have read about the guy that lives right outside the City of Grants Pass that was a victim of a burglary. See the following article from the GP Daily Courier on 12-2-15:

A man called police at 2:44 a.m. today to report that his home on Fruitdale Drive had been burglarized. Since his residence is outside of city limits, he was told to report the crime to the Sheriff’s Office during business hours. The Sheriff’s Office, which is understaffed, doesn’t have patrol deputies on duty at that hour, and Oregon State Police declined to respond.

The man, identified as 34-year-old Coen Beorn Ellenwood, said he would continue to call 911 until someone responded. At 2:50 a.m., he was told to stop calling. Over the next hour, he called 12 more times. Dispatchers eventually advised him to walk into Grants Pass city limits to speak with an officer. He did, and was arrested for improper use of 911 at the intersection of Fruitdale and Carnahan drives.

This article was posted on a popular local Facebook Group. The discussion that followed was interesting. Rather than equate this back to the fact that the Sheriff has not been given the funds by our citizens to operate his patrol/response department 24 hours a day, nearly 9 out of 10 messages or posts in response to this expressed some extreme frustration with somebody not getting the service they deserve – that is to say frustration with our law enforcement programs.

They were extremely upset with the City and County for not handling this guy's need properly. And of course they deserve to be upset. When somebody is the victim of crime they deserve services from local law enforcement. But equally tragic, an innocent member of our community that was the victim of a crime was himself arrested because he was so upset about not getting a response from the sheriff and OSP. There are so many ways this story is tragic but we'll stop here. The point is, people generally still don't seem equating this directly back to our County's law enforcement funding crisis so our efforts to increase trust and information is critical at this time.

The general consensus at this moment in time seems to be, Josephine County is not ready to approve a local tax measure that would add to the taxes paid locally to support law enforcement. At least, we're not ready to approve anything of significance that would make a large dent in the law enforcement/criminal justice system financial crisis in our County. This is how law enforcement is funded in just about every other community across the US, but it's not how our County has traditionally been supported and there is still much resistance to change...despite the very real crisis at hand today. It's a tragedy, as somewhere between 40% and 50% of our County voters want these services AND are willing to pay for them through property taxes per the results of previous votes. And just about everyone wants these safety services restored somehow.

Enter the "\$2 bill," the state legislative bill that would require all Counties in Oregon to levy at least \$2.00 per \$1,000 in total at the County level to support County government programs and County Law Enforcement/Justice programs (our County's rate is close to \$0.58, compared to an average rate across the state of nearly \$2.50). While we're hearing that a legislative concept is being considered for an upcoming state legislative session, there are significant (short-term) hurdles in front of this bill.

In order for the "\$2 bill" to be successful, here is our educated opinion of the fact-based hurdles it has to jump. It must first pass out of two legislative committees and be sent to the floor of the Oregon House and Senate. If both approve, they could then place it on the ballot for the next general election (note if this doesn't happen in the short February session the earliest it could be brought to a vote is November of 2018, to impact property tax rates starting in Fiscal Year 2020 if passed by voters). The final hurdle is ultimately a vote of the entire state, because it is a constitutional measure that reforms minimum property tax requirements in Oregon.

What we need today, as we see it, is a project that brings everyone together, one that we already generally know the citizens want and respect. What we need today is a project that makes a big financial impact but doesn't raise local tax rates. We need a project that is "shovel ready" and primed for the 2016 ballot. Our community needs a measure that would help restore trust in our local government and in our local public safety system. We need a project that is achievable, that all sides of the political spectrum can get behind. And we need to act quickly. **Our research suggests Josephine County residents and other partners across the state should focus on the Oregon Lottery Local Control Act for 2016.**

The Lottery Local Control Committee, the political group that is forwarding this measure, already did a statewide poll using the exact approved ballot language for the Lottery initiative and voters statewide said they would support it by a 3 to 1 margin. This means if this Committee can just

get the measure on the ballot it has a good chance of passing. This Committee fought all the way through the Oregon Supreme Court for a good ballot title and was successful.

The Committee has marketed the initiative to other Counties and many organizations and just about everyone is generally in favor of this initiative and appreciative of the outside the box proposal. But like any statewide measure effort, this will take a massive coordinated effort, larger than most of our local community members have ever done before, to get this on the ballot in 2016. We have until July 1st, 2016 to gather over 100,000 additional valid signatures to get this on the ballot next year. That is a monumental task, but achievable if we all come together and focus on this effort and all reach out to our contacts across Oregon.

This Lottery measure could bring in over \$5 million per year to JoCo that could be used for our highest priorities such as public safety or economic development, and it's a sustainable solution that doesn't change any local tax rates. In a nutshell, this measure would share 50% of the profits of the Oregon Lottery system with the Counties in proportion to the sales coming out of each County (without changing any existing constitutional spending requirements for the Lottery profits). **Local control as public policy is effective, because what our County needs is not the same as what other counties in Oregon need.** Each County knows best what it needs and the highest priorities that need funding. Each County across the state would be able to have more local control under this initiative.

The lottery initiative is generally an easy sell, but the Lottery Local Control Committee has had a hard time collecting financial contributions to the effort because it does benefit such a wide variety of stakeholders. We've also had organizations such as the Association of Oregon Counties hugely in favor of this initiative, but they told us they can't financially donate until such time as it's officially on the ballot. The Committee spent some time going after some potential large donors that have the capability of very large donations, but that hasn't yet panned out, again partially due to the wide appeal and not targeted at specific beneficiaries. The Committee has had a couple groups across the state jump on board to help gather signatures and collectively they're making slow progress because nobody is out there aggressively focusing on this.

The Lottery Committee seems to be in position to get this measure on the ballot if they aggressively collect volunteers, and if they work diligently and quickly. This effort is well ahead of many other statewide signature gathering efforts that are front and center in the news today, such as minimum wage initiatives. Many of those are still working through the court / ballot title process and are not even cleared for signature gathering. This measure is already in signature gathering mode, but as of now the Committee has expressed they don't have the financial or human resources to gather a significant amount of signatures.

If our own community can get behind this and go "all in" on this lottery initiative, at least for early 2016, and recruit a lot of help, we should know within a few months whether we have a shot for the 2016 ballot. The few local people that have been leading this effort can continue playing a part but they appear to need a lot of help. The help they need is in two main areas (fundraising and gathering signatures), but they have expressed they need team leaders that would help coordinate a number of the different parts of the effort. They need people dedicated to fundraising for the effort. They need leaders for the social media and email aspect of the effort

(the measure already has single signature petitions online for people to just download, sign, and mail in). Many individuals need to step up to help make this idea go viral online, so to speak.

The Lottery Committee is currently asking that everyone think about and recommend individuals they know would consider helping in this historic effort...there are many ways to help either financially or by volunteering some time. **The Committee stated that anyone with a Facebook or email account can help significantly with this effort, and there are other cost effective ways to help.**

Given SOS's research and citizens' input of late, SOS is recommending to all residents of Josephine County to step up and join an effort that brings us together and helps to restore local law enforcement. We're not a political organization but our research and the current version of the "citizen-voiced plan" leads us to recommend that **everyone ban together and support the [lottery local control initiative](#)** outside of working on existing SOS nonprofit projects. The lottery initiative is a political measure outside the scope of what SOS can work on directly...but our research shows it falls right in line with achieving our organization's mission.

There is so much more the Lottery Local Control Committee would like to say about the potential for the lottery initiative. But if this is successful in 2016, we can move into 2017 and assess how much more Josephine County needs to restore law enforcement and justice services. 2017 also puts us closer to the time of knowing whether or not the rest of the County's federal funds went away for good, which is an uncertainty that has hung over the head of many local efforts last few years. And our hope is that pursuing this measure would lead to a higher level of trust among the public by pursuing outside the box solutions that make an impact but don't increase local taxes. In other words, we recommend following the citizen voiced plan for the best chances of long-term success in restoring our County's law enforcement programs.

SOS can make some recommendations related to research, but in the end SOS is a non-profit and has to focus on research, education, and awareness activities and not political campaigns. The lottery initiative is now a political campaign that is being run under the [Lottery Local Control Committee](#). While SOS cannot directly focus on this political effort, from the perspective of our fellow County residents **we feel that now is the time to be bold and take a stand on unifying this this County, because the train is starting to crash and we feel the Lottery measure has the potential to help prevent the whole train from running off the tracks.**

We have one more series of data points before we wrap up this report. At the recent Cave Junction SOS forum, a Sheriff's office volunteer that helps take reports at the Cave Junction substation was in attendance. Here are the stats in terms of number of crimes reported by people walking into the CJ substation to report them (these do NOT include 911 calls, internet reports, or any other types of reported crimes except walk ins to the substation): 2012 – 41 reports, 2013 – 98 reports, 2014 – 166 reports, 2015 as of early December – 231 reports...all from a substation in CJ that is only open two days a week. With the Sheriff's deputies only working 10 hours a day and generally having to just run from call to call right now, we don't even want to guess how many of those reports are not being followed up on by sheriff deputies.

We've never believed we have a huge amount of individuals causing crimes, but that number is likely growing without holding them accountable. We have a small handful of problem makers that are not being held accountable and are therefore getting bolder by the day...leading to more

crime and eventually a higher severity of crime. A minimal level of accountability would go a very long way on making an impact on crime in our County.

And all parts of the criminal justice system need to be available otherwise the system falls apart; we need response and patrol from officers, we need a properly funded jail operation, we need a funded DA, and we need more juvenile justice capacity. One of our members recently suggested he feels like our community right now is like a boiling frog, and by the time we realize how hot the water has become it may be too late. Think about stories you've heard about losing a street or a small part of a neighborhood to crime or drug activity and think about how hard it is and how long it takes to get that street or neighborhood back to a safe clean place. That is what is slowly happening to our whole County while we sit back and are afraid to take action for fear of it not being politically acceptable.

We need to find something we can all rally around, and we need to do so quickly. Did you see the video series SOS completed last spring? Here is an online compilation of some of that video work and if you don't have time to watch the whole video please watch the last two minutes: [\[CLICK HERE\]](#). This speaks to the need of having all core parts of the criminal justice system available and functioning to make an impact on this crisis.

In the end, trust, and restoring trust, while coming together to work on something we all support, will be priceless in measuring our impact of efforts to restore safety to Josephine County. We hope you share our vision of how we can best restore safety to our County and steps we can take in the short-term. Because after all, this vision is what the majority of the County says they would likely get behind and it's what we have for a citizen-voiced plan today. Whatever you personally decide is right for SOS, our advice at this time is to focus your available time and talents outside your current SOS duties on one big project next year, and make that project something that we can all get behind so we can help our County to build trust. **So...what say you?**

We look forward to your help in building a "secure, stable, and sustainable Josephine County."

Sincerely,

The Board of Directors
Securing Our Safety
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