

## **Budget Committee**

### **Meeting Minutes**

Tuesday, May 12, 2026, 6:00pm  
Jean Marie Gaulke Community Meeting Room  
502 State St, Hood River  
Budget officer: Rachael Fox

Meeting notes prepared: Rachael Fox and Mo Burford

Present: Rachael Fox (Staff), Mo Burford (Staff), Budget Committee Members: Jen Bayer, Catherine Bourgault, Karen Bureker, Megan Janik, Sara Marsden, Jessica Metta, Yesi Rojas, Jean Sheppard and Eric Stasak. Uplift Local Documenter Natasha White.

#### **I. Nomination and election of Chair** Fox

Library Director Rachael Fox called the meeting to order at 6:00pm. Marsden nominated Bayer to serve as Committee Chair. Janik seconded. The motion carried unanimously with affirmative votes from Bayer, Bourgault, Bureker, Janik, Marsden, Metta, Rojas, Sheppard and Stasak.

#### **II. Additions/deletions from the agenda (ACTION)** Bayer

Janik moved to approve the agenda as presented. Rojas seconded. The motion carried unanimously with affirmative votes from Bayer, Bourgault, Bureker, Janik, Marsden, Metta, Rojas, Sheppard and Stasak.

#### **III. Conflicts or potential conflicts of interest** Bayer

None stated.

#### **IV. Budget message** Fox

Fox presented the budget as outlined in the budget packet. Under the section on expanding services at Hood River Gardens Library, she noted that the plan includes installing a covering for the outdoor seating areas. The current pergola on the west side of the garden will receive a covering for shade and rain protection, and a separate round area in the garden will also be covered for the same reasons. Stasak asked if there was a pergola and what kind of covering is currently on the pergola. Fox clarified that the pergola is currently open and will receive the new covering, and that the round area above in the garden will also become a covered area for shade and wet weather protection.

Fox also stated the District will implement Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology at all locations to improve operational efficiency and maintain an up-to-date collection, launch a new website with an easy-to-navigate interface and integrated library and meeting room calendars, and install new children's shelving to improve access to popular picture books. These projects will be funded by the Library Foundation.

Bayer noted the outdoor structures are not part of this year's budget but will be completed in the coming year. Fox clarified these items were from the previous budget, carried over to be completed this coming fiscal year. Stasak confirmed they would be spent in this fiscal year, and Fox agreed.

Fox also explained the District will update library spaces using a universal design approach, adding new shelving, signage, and more at the Parkdale Library to improve ADA access, also funded by the Library Foundation. The District will additionally explore adding ADA-accessible buttons for public restrooms at the Hood River Library.

During discussion of strategic goals and programming, Stasak asked where patrons can find information about what's going on. Fox referenced the current events calendar, the website, and the newsletter, noting that more people are visiting the website than social media. She added that paid online advertising has had little effect, and that the new website calendar will launch in June on the current website.

Bourgault asked how the District determines which items to add to the library of things. Fox explained that a committee meets a few times a year to review patron suggestions and plan purchases for the coming quarter, considering factors such as upkeep, price, anticipated community use, and what other libraries offer.

Bayer asked if there were any further questions. There were none.

## **V. Presentation of proposed budget**

### **i. General Fund**

Fox

Fox directed participants to follow along using their handouts. Fox read through the revenue section of the budget committee packet. Sheppard asked why the cash balance was significantly lower than the previous year. Fox explained that \$100,000 had been transferred to the capital fund one year and \$50,000 the following year; these transfers represent funds reserved for capital expenditures. She noted the balance would have been even lower, but savings from a vacant position had resulted in more funds being carried over than anticipated. Bayer asked for clarification. Fox confirmed that the higher-than-expected carryover was tied to the vacant position and indicated the topic would be addressed in more detail later in the budget presentation. Bayer acknowledged and stated it was her only question.

Fox read through the expenditure section of the budget committee packet starting with personnel services. Stasak asked for insight into the hiring of the Youth Services position, including how long the search took and whether the candidate was local. Fox explained the District hired someone from out of the area who is studying to earn their Master of Library Information Science. She noted there were delays along the way, as one candidate accepted the position but ultimately did not take it. Stasak asked where the position was advertised. Fox stated the District advertised through the Pacific

Northwest Library Association, Indeed, the District newsletter, social media and on site. She added that additional delays occurred because a more immediate position needed to be filled, with she and Mo covering those duties in the interim. Fox explained the position was expanded to provide greater support for Children, Teen and Tween, and Outreach services.

Bayer noted the position is close to but not quite full-time and asked if that was intentional given the District has few full-time employees. Fox explained that some applicants prefer not to work full-time and the position at 32-35 hours attracted more candidates than 32 hours, and that some current team members are not wanting full-time work at this time.

Sheppard noted the budget reflects approximately \$71,000 higher than the prior year and asked whether the final figures were expected to be close and whether the staffing budget was significantly higher than what was actually spent last year. Fox explained that the staffing budget includes potential cost increases for items such as insurance and cost of living, and that the District budgets conservatively because those costs can be unpredictable.

Sheppard acknowledged the approach and noted the District was fortunate that healthcare costs did not increase. Fox agreed, calling it unusual. Sheppard asked which insurance provider the District uses. Fox stated the District uses the Special Districts Insurance Services, which provides coverage through Blue Cross Blue Shield, and noted costs are expected to increase next year.

Bayer questioned whether the table heading "Current FT Salary" was accurate and suggested it be changed to "Current Salary." She noted the math in the column appeared correct but felt the label could be clearer. Fox reviewed the chart and acknowledged the heading could be relabeled for next year to better reflect the pro-rated nature of the figures. Bayer suggested someone verify the math, and Fox thanked her for the observation.

Bureker asked whether new healthcare coverage begins in January. Fox clarified that while the benefits year runs on the calendar year, the District's coverage renewal through Special Districts Association now aligns with the fiscal year, renewing in July, meaning prices will not change until the next budget cycle. Bureker acknowledged the same arrangement applies to her organization.

Fox read through the expenditure section of the budget committee packet materials and services.

Stasak asked who handles the library's IT. Fox responded that Radcomp provides IT services. She also noted that the budget includes a new annual fee for the library website and events calendar/meeting room reservation software.

Sheppard asked whether courier funding would continue through July of the following year. Fox confirmed it is guaranteed, noting no changes are expected. She added that Sage is stabilizing prices and working toward sustainability, and that the library ranks first in borrowing and third in lending.

Janik asked about the charge for faxing. Fox explained it is free for patrons, running over the phone line, and said she could provide exact costs once the numbers are ordered.

Janik noted the Cascade Locks Justice court is one of the last places in Cascade Locks that offers faxing, and that because they have no charge sheet, they do not offer public faxing — suggesting the service at the Cascade Locks Library could be beneficial.

Sheppard asked whether the library is still paying for the outdoor public phone. Fox confirmed it is part of the phone system, described it as cost-effective, and noted it is free for patrons and makes about 50 calls per month. Sheppard noted she has observed patrons using it.

Fox noted that the training and professional services line items are increasing to reflect a growing number of staff attending professional conferences and the hiring of trainers, including an upcoming de-escalation training on Friday.

Stasak remarked that he found this encouraging and asked whether de-escalation has proven to be an important skill in library operations. Fox confirmed it has been very helpful and valuable for staff.

Bayer asked what was actually spent from June 1 through mid-November compared to the estimated 10–12% budget padding, and said she would need to pull the figures. She characterized the padding as generous and noted the funds are continually being carried over.

Fox estimated the amount at approximately \$80,000 and expressed concern about rising health insurance costs and minimum wage increases, noting the library may need to draw on those reserves in the future. She cautioned that projected income may not cover those increases alone, and that once the money is spent it will not replenish the following year.

Bayer acknowledged the reasoning but said she consistently advocates for directing public dollars toward staff and facilities — whether through additional staff hours or programming. She suggested that historical spending data from prior years could help inform the discussion, and recognized that Fox's projections are experience-based, not guesses.

Fox reiterated her concern about adding staffing without sustainable funding, noting that income and expenses are currently running close to even. Fox stated she did not

want have to lay off staff in the future.

Janik confirmed her understanding that income is not expected to grow significantly.

Sheppard asked whether the RFID system would help reduce staff time. Fox confirmed it would, noting it speeds up processing items and locating holds — estimating it to be three to four times faster than current methods.

Sheppard asked whether new self-checkout stations would be installed. Fox confirmed there would be units both upstairs and downstairs. Sheppard noted this should also reduce demands on staff time.

Stasak observed that income growth has not kept pace with inflation in services, despite rising property values, and suggested a 3% annual increase is a reasonable expectation going forward.

Bayer added that new residential construction will continue to grow the tax base incrementally.

Sheppard noted that available land for development is limited, as much of it is already owned by various entities, constraining significant growth.

Stasak acknowledged the budget constraints and commended Fox for her careful stewardship of the 3.3% figure.

Fox noted that materials, insurance, and cost of living continue to rise across the board. Janik added that cost-of-living increases affect all employees, not just one position. Sheppard agreed that utilities and insurance rise every year and may increase sharply in the coming year.

Bayer suggested it would be worthwhile to reassess the cost of materials in light of ongoing inflation. Fox welcomed the suggestion and confirmed she would do so, then asked if there were any further questions.

ii. **Capital Equipment Reserve Fund**

Fox

Fox presented the budget as presented in the budget packet.

Stasak paused to offer broader context, drawing a contrast with other community projects he has been involved with. He noted that the library's resources are meeting expenditures, the facility is available at no cost, and there is no backlog of deferred maintenance — a situation markedly different from what the community is experiencing elsewhere.

Sheppard observed that the library is one of the few special districts capable of maintaining quality services within its budget, calling it a remarkable achievement.

Stasak credited the three-legged stool of the Friends of the Library, the Library

Foundation, and tax funding as the foundation of that stability, noting the momentum and community support are clearly reflected in the budget.

Metta added that the excellence of library staff deserves equal recognition.

Sheppard noted that unexpected donations, such as those from the Carnegie Foundation, further strengthen the library's position.

Fox expressed gratitude, noting that the Foundation's fundraising letter had been particularly successful.

Bayer added that the Foundation is expected to contribute nearly \$135,000 this year.

Fox noted the section under the Unappropriated Ending Fund balance starting with "Estimating \$83,000 in carryover" should have been placed at the end of the Unappropriated Ending Fund balance section in the General Fund.

iii. **Grants Fund**

Fox

Fox presented the budget as presented in the budget packet.

Bayer noted a small error on the right side of the document, indicating it should read "26–27." Fox thanked her and confirmed the correction would be made.

Stasak asked about the identity of Pat Hazlehurst. Fox explained that Hazlehurst helped establish the Hood River Reads program at the library. She had relocated from Maine, joined the Friends of the Library, and introduced the concept of a community reads program based on one she knew from her previous community. After her passing from cancer, her friends established a fund in her name with the intent that proceeds would support library programming. Those funds now go toward children's programming at the library.

Bayer noted that the fund is held by the Gorge Community Foundation.

Fox presented the conclusion statement as presented in the budget packet.

VI. **Public comment**

Bayer

Bayer opened the floor for comments, but first acknowledged Fox for another excellent job preparing and presenting the budget. She then invited comments from anyone in the room or online.

VII. **Budget Committee questions and deliberations**

Bayer

Bayer invited comments from anyone in the room or online. There were no additional comments.

VIII. **Approval of budget (ACTION)**

Bayer

Sheppard made a motion to approve the recommended budget committee motion for \$3,010,000. Janik seconded. The motion carried unanimously with affirmative votes from Bayer, Bourgault, Bureker, Janik, Marsden, Metta, Rojas, Sheppard and Stasak.

Metta made a motion to approve the tax rate of \$.39 per \$1,000 of assessed value for the permanent rate tax levy. Stasak seconded. The motion carried unanimously with affirmative votes from Bayer, Bourgault, Bureker, Janik, Marsden, Metta, Rojas, Sheppard and Stasak.

IX. **Recess or adjournment**

Bayer

The meeting was adjourned at 7:21pm.