

Citizen Budget Committee

Lewis County, Washington

November 5, 2019

# Budget Review and Recommendations to the Lewis County Board of County Commissioners

Commissioners:

Edna J. Fund, First District

Robert "Bobby" Jackson, Second District

Gary Stamper, Third District

## Citizen Budget Committee:

Laura Berg  
 Frank Corbin  
 Paul Crowner  
 Bill Kassen  
 Bill Marshall  
 Bill Serrahn

## Citizen Participants:

Olga Miller  
 Lindsey Pollock  
 Linda Williams

## Statement of Intent:

It was the intent of the Citizen Budget Committee (CBC) to listen, learn, ask questions, be able to communicate our understanding to others, and to formulate ideas and recommendations to present to the Lewis County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) for their consideration. We truly appreciate being given a seat at the table!

We do not offer this product portraying ourselves as professionals or as experts in county budget; rather, we are citizens who are interested in serving our county. Through listening to Departmental presentations, asking questions of staff, and speaking with our elected officials, we hope to offer a "fresh set of eyes" and possibly communicate ideas worthy of consideration for the betterment of our county. Finally, we don't for a minute claim that we have thoroughly or exhaustively reviewed the county budget. We do, however understand more than we did when we started.

## General Findings:

1. **Staff:** The greatest asset of any organization is the staff members who provide service to the public, to their organization, and its leadership. Without professional and competent staff, an organization will not succeed. We have found that the staff is outstanding and we are fortunate. We sense a positive working relationship between staff and the leadership of Lewis County which is conducive to exceeding the expectations of the public.
2. **Budget Overall:** We believe the budget is managed in a thoughtful and professional manner with transparency, and a strong sense of integrity and fiscal responsibility. Audits are conducted as per state and local law. The public is encouraged to ask questions, and to give input.
3. **Succession Planning:** Significant thought to succession planning was noted in some of the department presentations. It is the consensus of this committee that we would recommend that all departments prioritize cross-training where possible to allow for "training up the next generation who will follow." This will increase job satisfaction and allow each department to retain institutional knowledge when changes in staff occur.
4. **Rainy Day Funding:** There is a sense that the county is concerned with "saving for a rainy day" and some funds are set aside for future unexpected emergencies or a sudden economic downturn. The committee recommends that the county does what it can to save for such times that will come. We have discovered that some local governments try to save 5% to 10% annually for such a fund but we understand it will not be easy.
5. **Fleet Management:** The committee observed that budget sets aside funds for vehicle replacement so money is available when the time comes to replace them. The committee would

like to recommend that when the need arises for a new vehicle that it is planned for as far in advance as possible so the funds can be saved for it so funds are available when the vehicle is truly needed.

6. **Financial Resources:** The committee recognizes that there are a lot of demands placed on county government and funding is finite. There is no easy answer to this except being fiscally conservative and doing the business of the county in a fiscally conservative way.
7. **Inter-governmental Relationships:** It appears that the BOCC and staff have good relationships with our state elected officials and the management of various agencies. This is vital to securing needed finances and services where they are needed. Continuing to lobby our state legislature for funding unfunded or underfunded mandates is ongoing and vitally important.
8. **Contracting:** Numerous contracts have been executed in order to provide required services to the county. The committee would like to ask the BOCC and staff to consider a professional, thorough review of the county contracting processes and area of competition with the initial goal of seeking out more competition to obtain better, innovation, and potential cost savings.
9. **Departmental Increase Requests:** The committee focused its work on reviewing the end of year increase requests after listening to the department heads present their department needs to the BOCC and to the CBC. Should funding continue to be available, we offer the following recommendations to the BOCC to help in making their decisions.

## Departmental Increase Requests and Citizen Budget Committee Recommendations:

In some cases, the committee didn't feel that it had all the necessary information needed to make a fully informed decision. The consensus is to recommend that the BOCC approve the following increase requests contingent upon the availability of funds. For your consideration, please note the following:

Indigent Defense: \$337,000

The committee recognizes that Indigent Defense is required and that the BOCC supports this. However, we regret that the committee is unsure if the full Class A rate of \$1,000 per case in addition to an hourly rate of \$100/hour is fair, reasonable, and comparable to the rates secured by other counties. The recommendation of the committee to the BOCC is to **approve** this request so long as the amounts are within the norms of other county governments.

Sup Ct Admin: \$28,519

A majority of the committee members agree that the Court Commissioners salary be tied-in at the rate of 85% of the Superior Court Judge. This saves the department from having to make regular requests of the BOCC for salary increases. It also helps to remove any future potential or appearance of political influence with the justice system. The recommendation of the committee is to **approve** this request.

Animal Shelter: \$18,144

The recommendation of the committee is to **approve** this request.

District Court: \$71,506

The recommendation of the committee is to **approve** this request.

Prosecutor: \$100,000

The recommendation of the committee is to take a close look at the need and cost of "professional services, interpreters, and other operational costs" before approval. The committee at this point is unable to make a concrete recommendation of approval for this request with the information available.

Sheriff: \$22,433

The committee unanimously agrees that this request is more than reasonable and recommends **approval**.

Jail: \$537,826

The \$150,000 cost for a body scanner appears to be included in this request. If it actually comes out of the capital budget, then the committee recommends that the difference be **approved**.

Jail: \$70,000

The recommendation of the committee is to **approve** this request but that future vehicles needed by the county be planned for in advance so funds can be set aside.

Juvenile: \$25,400

The recommendation of the committee is to **approve** this request.

Auditor: \$5,433

The recommendation of the committee is to **approve** this request.

Mental Health Tax Programs- Jail MH prescriptions: \$81,600

The recommendation of the committee is to **approve** this request.

Mental Health Tax Programs- Drug Court: \$81,329

The recommendation of the committee is to **approve** this request.

Mental Health Tax Programs-Family Recovery Court: \$8,700

The recommendation of the committee is to **approve** this request.

Public Health & Social Services: \$59,003

The recommendation of the committee is to **approve** this request.

Lewis County Senior Services (see letter sent 09/27/2019) (Late add): \$100,000

The recommendation of the committee is to **approve half** of this request (\$50,000) until they provide their financials (cash on hand, income & sources, and expenses); in other words provide a clear budget to the BOCC. Once this has been done, then it is recommended that the full amount of \$100,000 be approved for 2020.

The committee recommends that this non-profit organization develop a path to financial self-sufficiency by utilizing the financial resources that are available through grants. The committee fully agrees of the need for these services but after three years of the generous support of the BOCC, it is time that this much needed and worthy organization become less dependent upon the county general fund. Also, with additional funding that can be realized from grants, the organization can grow and provide even more high quality services to the community. It is also recommended that the county offer whatever assistance it can to help this non-profit in this endeavor.

There was considerable discussion on this subject where some members believed the committee should not recommend approval of any amount and those who recommended approval of the total amount. The compromise was half now, and the other half when the above conditions have been met.

Lewis County Facilities Maintenance: \$58,746

The committee recognizes the great work performed by the maintenance staff. Facilities are clean and well-maintained. The committee recommends **approval** of this request. It is also recommended that this department be encouraged to look for additional efficiencies such as equipment that can save on labor costs to minimize the need for additional FTE in the future.

Lewis County Facilities Maintenance- Capital Projects Coordinator: \$77,760

The recommendation of the committee is to **approve** this request.

## Conclusion:

The committee members look forward to your feedback and it is our hope that this document is helpful to the work you do.

Respectfully submitted,

Citizen Budget Committee  
Lewis County, Washington

November 5, 2019

**Lewis County Washington Board of County Commissioners**

Sirs / Madams;

Re: My Experience serving on the Lewis County Citizen's 2020 Budget Committee.

Serving on the Lewis County Citizens Budget Committee is attending an intense educational seminar on the workings and finances of the Lewis County Washington government. Our experience varied, with some of us having served on government committees before, and some, including myself, for the first time.

Over three days, elected officials, county department heads, and their staff, explained their mission, their challenges, and their funding needs to our citizen's committee and the county commissioners. Our members were impressed by their professionalism, knowledge, forthrightness, and enthusiasm. They spoke mostly to us, and not only to the commissioners, who ultimately fund their departments. Committee members asked a lot of questions, which sometimes produced spontaneous discussions, but always resulted in a satisfactory answer.

The citizen's committee was also given a tour of the County Jail and Juvenile Court facilities. We came away with the impression that the people in our law and justice system truly have compassion and are striving for the best outcomes for the people in their care.

County Budget Manager, Becky Butler, was our facilitator, guiding the entire process with skill and patience. Becky has an extensive knowledge base of county government and its finances, always providing information and background on any topic on which our committee or others had questions.

The Lewis County Commissioners, Edna Fund, Bobby Jackson, and Gary Stamper, as well as County Manager, Erik Martin, attended the presentations and contributed, but did not preside over them. Of course, they too have extensive experience, knowledge, and background with everything presented to us.

The amazing thing was that commissioners, elected officials, department heads, staff, and our citizen's committee were all equals at the table. We were all seriously delving into the county's workings and finances, with none on our committee feeling less important, or less entitled to ask a question, than our elected officials.

Our citizens committee met again on day four to discuss the presented budgets and wrap up our mandate. We were in general agreement that the regular budget, as presented, met the necessities, but didn't find any extravagance which we felt should be eliminated. We questioned some of the additional budget requests which will be detailed in the committee's report. Members also had some suggestions on improving the budget process.

I believe all of us on the committee, commend Lewis County elected officials, managers, and employees for embracing open government and including citizens in the governmental process. We believe that this policy improves the functioning of and promotes trust in our Lewis County Government. We also hope that the process promotes trust in our judgement as informed citizens to understand the functions, responsibilities, services, and needs of our county government.

**"Government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the Earth."**

Sincerely,



William J. Serrahn

Member, Lewis County Citizen's 2020 Budget Committee