

Submitter: Cori Wiessner

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

Dear Co-Chair Kate Lieber, Co-Chair Tawna Sanchez, and members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means,

My name is Cori Wiessner, Public Works Director for Hood River County. I am responsible for the County's Roads, Fleet, Parks, and Facilities. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to speak with you on Wednesday during your listening session, I am advocating on behalf of Hood River County and our critical infrastructure needs.

Our Courthouse is currently in a state of disrepair, and keeping a basic level of safety and service for this building is becoming more challenging and costly to the County each year.

We have leaks through the roofs, walls, windows and foundation. To alleviate the leaks from the roof, the County team has spent several weeks to seal all seams in the roof membrane seams, updated flashing, and sealed the parapet walls. During a soft wash of the building, we experienced water leaking in the building through both the windows and the walls. We have additionally worked on caulking the windows.

Additionally, the County team has been spending time upgrading fluorescent bulbs to LED. This seemingly easy task requires several hours to find the correct breaker to perform the work safely. Once identified, many of these needs significant rewiring due to brittle wires to change the bulbs.

The Courthouse HVAC system uses boilers and radiators to heat a portion of the building and is supplemented with other systems to cover the remainder. In 2023, the County rebuilt the boiler. In 2025, the County is working to update the controllers. Both of these systems were at a failure point. Areas not reached by the boilers and supplemented by other systems are nearing the end of their lives or have already failed. We are programming the replacement schedule of these systems in future budget cycles.

In the County's fiscal year 2026 budget, we are including the concrete repair to the Courthouse Exterior, which is currently crumbling.

These are some of the examples of serious challenges the County faces with maintenance to continue basic safety and service of the facility.

We ask for your support to help fund a safe workplace for the 7th District Court and public safety operations.

Additionally, Hood River County maintains 210 center-lane miles of roadway which access homes, businesses, local farms, and tourist destinations. These tourist destinations include Federal Forests trails and campgrounds, State Campgrounds, Gorge Scenic areas, Ski destinations, and our popular Fruit Loop. Hood River County roads connect City, State, and Port to people's homes, work, and support local and regional economy.

The County leverages grants where possible, but due to limited staffing, we are struggling with the capacity to apply for and administer the grants. Since Hood River County does not have adequate staffing levels or consistent federal funding, we are not a Certified Agency. This means when Hood River County is successful in federal grants, many times, we are required to have ODOT administer these projects at a higher cost than if we could administer them ourselves. This increases our match and limits the number of projects we can deliver.

I am having serious conversations with our commissioners, constituents, and staff on the need to cut more basic services. Due to previous budget cuts, Hood River County has cut over half of our public works staff. We have removed asphalt resurfacing, rock crushing, and have already introduced several cost saving techniques to meet budget with revenues.

Some of the proposals on cuts are to cut even more staffing. We are considering doing even less chip seal to preserve the roadways, limiting overtime during snowplow operations and possibly remove lower priority roads from snowplow services,

removing white edge lane striping, letting signs get to future disrepair before replacement, limit ditch work, vegetation removal, and being less responsive to our constituents. All of these items we're considering cutting provide safety and service for our travelling public including regular travelers, the trucking industry, our farmers and the bike community.

During our chip seal operations, we call in our Engineering Manager (1) and entire Fleet staff (4) when we're doing our roadwork to assist in flagging trucking. Bringing these people into road maintenance delays other work for the remainder of the County including issuing permits and performing fleet maintenance for our other departments such as the Sheriff's office, Health department, and Assessors Office.

We have seen a 1-point decline in our pavement ratings in the past 6 years, year over-year, and anticipate that decline more rapidly due to increasing costs of materials. Cutting more staff will result in less chip seal work due to the need to outsource flagging and trucking.

Outside the Transportation Package, the County is advocating funding Bridge #07406 East Fork Hood River, Lost Lake Bridge. We have requested funds through the Local Bridge Grant and were not successful because this bridge rated higher than others within the state. In addition to the rating of the bridge, this bridge is in a high scour area and is the only viable evacuation route for 1,500 residents and many more tourists. Wildfire risks west of the bridge put these individuals at risk and limit access for fire, police, and ambulance services from the east.

The bridge also holds the only water source for the City of Hood River and the unincorporated town of Odell. A failure of the bridge puts the entire Hood River County in a water crisis for drinking and fire suppression.

Thank you to the Co-Chairs, Co-Vice-Chairs, and Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means.