

Budget Committee Meeting – May 14, 2018 10:00AM

Re: Scheduled Surveyor Report 2:00P

**Curry County Surveyor Comments by Reily Smith,  
County Surveyor**

Copies provided by John Jezuit, Administrative Assistant

## **CURRY COUNTY SURVEYOR'S COMMENTS** **FOR THE 2018-2019 BUDGET COMMITTEE**

### **Overview:**

The Curry County Surveyor's Office is a unique department compared to the operation of other County Departments. Beginning with the first County Surveyor after formation of Curry County in 1855, they have almost always done side work. The County Surveyor position was established to survey and mark smaller portions of the Public Land Surveys for settlers. Most County Surveyor's had outside offices with a number of employees. One County Surveyor (1970's & 1980's) seemed to keep his crews busy during slow times doing perpetuation of the Public Land Survey System (PLSS) monuments. Actually, they did a lot of essential work and practically none of this necessary perpetuation work has been done since.

Jerry Floyd left the position in May 2012 and the position has been part-time since. Bryan Flavin and Reily Smith have worked part-time with occasional side jobs for private citizens. An essential attribute for any good land surveyor is to be scrupulously honest and conduct their affairs with integrity. All inquiries at the County Surveyor's Office for surveyors references are referred to the list of surveyors doing work in Curry County. This list is available online and at the office. The little bit of side work Reily does seems to be only jobs other surveyors don't want to do because of inherent problems.

The Surveyor's Office has been cut back to "bare bones". There is a Department Specialist, Barbara Colton, who is temporary part-time with no benefits, except state-mandated sick leave and she does work enough hours to contribute to the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS). Barbara is almost always in the office during the Surveyor's office hours. The County Surveyor has only been working about 11 hours a week and the only fringe benefit is the sick leave, but that probably will never be used. If Reily is sick on a work day, it is just made up at a later date.

We have been able to serve the public with official office hours of Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. The County Surveyor usually puts in 8 hours on Tuesdays but is available to discuss issues with the County cell phone when needed, or by appointment. Emails received on the County phone are forwarded to Reily's home email and time-sensitive map checks or other questions are usually answered before his regular workday. Emails and phone calls are always acknowledged and the time is rarely charged to the County.

Reily was ready to quit in early 2018. He felt that working for the County seemed to be a one way street; that is, take a cut in pay and reduce his office budget this fiscal year, stay under budget during the year, continue to use his equipment and truck for county work; continue to donate supplies and time to try to do a good job, but when he asked for a minor consideration, suddenly it was a big deal. Commissioner Boice asked what it would take for him to stay, and he asked for a raise to \$56/per hour. Reily figured at \$56 per hour, he would continue to do the job, but feel a little more like he was being compensated for some of his pro-bono time, materials and truck/equipment depreciation. The prior fiscal year, the pay had been reduced from \$49.20 per hour to \$40 to try to save the County money and a reduction of hours from about 18 to the approximate 11 hours.

Reily has recently purchased Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) equipment that has been used more for County work than his private work. He uses his truck and field equipment as needed (the County has some equipment, but very little that is suitable for today's technological world). He continues to use his office equipment and software at home and in the County Offices for the County's benefit. Reily has also spent over \$2500 of his own money on continuing education in the last year. Reily has been in practice since 1980 and is licensed as a Professional Land Surveyor in Oregon and California. He is also a Certified Federal Surveyor and Oregon Certified Water Rights Examiner. He likes his work and truly enjoys assisting the public (most of the time) with their boundary, easement, and other common questions. Reily treats the review of other surveyor's work, prior to filing their maps, as a "peer" review to ensure the public gets the best job possible. Reily is semi-retired and his private work is a very small percentage of his income. Reily donates a lot of personal time to the public in an effort to "give back" and share his knowledge/experience. However, some extra money to supplement his "semi-retirement" is necessary.

Barbara Colton is an outstanding employee. She ran her own business for 18 years and since then has worked for companies that followed very strict procedures and security protocols. She is very detail oriented and enjoys the work of the Surveyors' office. Barbara has been one of the leaders in setting up and administering the County's website. She has helped the Community Development Department during the year and recently, due to Community Development's tight budget, has helped that Department out without charging her time to them (with the County Surveyor's okay). With the new County Website and the new GIS online, much of what we wanted to accomplish in the Surveyor's Office over the last 3 years has been completed. Helping the public, providing mandated services, map filing & general office functions can still be provided with Barbara Colton helping out Community Development.

Recently, the National Geodetic Survey (NGS) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has requested assistance from local government and private surveyors to gather 8 hours of GPS data on necessary benchmarks to increase the accuracy of the upcoming adjustment to the 2018 Geoid (The geoid is the modeled shape of the earth only considering gravitation and rotation). This geoid will be used in a new datum adjustment called NAPGD 2022 (North American Pacific Geopotential Datum). This is important because it will be utilized for elevations (like FEMA's Flood Elevations) and horizontal coordinates for all large-scale mapping. It is estimated that the change will be up to 2 meters horizontally and it seemed like they said about ½ meter vertically. When it looked like the County Surveyor was going to be leaving, about 15% of the necessary observations were completed on County time and Reily was going to complete it on his own time using his GNSS equipment after leaving. Since then, Reily has continued to do these observations on his own time and has completed 3 ½ of the 6 benchmarks required. Unfortunately, 4 of the 6 needed monuments are just outside Curry County in Del Norte, Josephine, and Coos. With failed observations and post-processing of the data, each one seems to take about 3 days with extensive travel to finally complete two, 4-hour observations. With canopy in this area, finding old benchmarks that are suitable for GPS has proven to be difficult. We have until August 31, 2018, to complete the observations.

#### **Surveyor's Current Work Status:**

All of our filed maps and almost all "unfiled" maps or records that had been squirreled away in the Surveyor's Office have been scanned and are available to the public in paper form or free online. A few that could not be scanned are referenced online and can be viewed in the office. The County Surveyor can usually accomplish the necessary office tasks in one day at the office each week with a few extra hours occasionally needed for field map checks or after hours citizen inquiries.

With a big portion of the County Surveyor's funding coming from the Monument Perpetuation Fund, it is felt that more work needs to be done in the field. At least 97% of the PLSS Corners in Curry County have not been visited in over 50 years and close to 120+ years in some cases. When the term "corner" is used, it refers to a monument that was (is) placed at a section corner, ¼ corner or another corner by the original Government Land Office's Cadastral Surveyors. These GLO surveys are the foundation of all private property lines in the Western United States. Some corners on Federal land (BLM, Forestry Service, etc.) have never been visited, but that is their problem. Many of the old wood stakes were replaced during previous County Surveyor's tenure, but some of the old wood stakes set in the 1800's are "long gone" and the corners have never been visited. The intention of the Monument Perpetuation Fund is to visit these corners, rehabilitate or replace (re-survey) needed monuments, reference accessories (bearing trees in most cases) update the corner records, etc.

#### **Surveyor's Budget Issues:**

During the first few years, Reily was County Surveyor, so many records needed to be updated, scanned and arranged so they could be easily located, that this was considered necessary for the Monument Perpetuation work. However, with this work completed, it is time to do more fieldwork. The above discussion of the PLSS corner work needed was to justify the request to work an extra day each week to begin this essential job. In cases where a monument is missing, considerable work is usually necessary to replace it. If the budget will not allow this fieldwork and these Monument Perpetuation Funds are going to continue to be used, a change in the County Ordinance should be made to utilize the funds for other uses. Without a change in the ordinance, Reily's fear is an audit would show some of the funds have been used for general office and other services to the public.

The Monument Perpetuation Fund (properly called the "Public Land Corner Preservation Fund") was established in 1986 (County Ordinance No. 86-1) ORS 203.148 authorizes the county to establish a fee not to exceed \$10 for each. During the early part of this ordinance and larger general fund allocations in early years to the Surveyor's Office, quite a bit of work was done as a result. Unfortunately, the total annual contributions to the fund would not be sufficient for much more than 35 days of field work for a survey crew today. If necessary, it could take up to 10 days just to reestablish one missing corner (depending on the terrain and ground cover) counting office and field time. This would be an extreme example, but just rehabilitating an existing monument would probably take, at best, ½ to 1 day each. A guess would be that there are over 4000 public land corners in Curry County.

There has been some discussion about Barbara Colton working for Community Development and working part-time as needed (1 to 2 days each week) in the Surveyor's Office. This will

save some money, and still maintain the open survey office hours we have maintained for the last 6 years. This may be a good idea to possibly save some money and maintain services.

Unfortunately, due to PERS, the County Surveyor cannot work over 600 hours each year. If funding can be made available, the County Surveyor would like to hire and train a part-time technician to do much of this Monument Perpetuation work.

If the intent is to really cut back on overall expenditures, the Surveyor's Office will take whatever reductions are deemed necessary and strive to continue to serve the public as best as possible. Hopefully, any overall reductions would be shared by everyone and not just the part-time departments and the part-time employees.

If funds are critical, perhaps a reduced variation of what Josephine County does would work for Curry County. Josephine has 2 full-time employees and one temporary employee (one in the office, one in the field doing corner work with the temporary helping in the office). The County Surveyor works 20 hours a month only doing the things requiring a license, like checking maps and I think he does that from his personal office.

Thank you for your consideration.

Reily Smith