

LINN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



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Commissioners to double Youth Wage Grant stipend

ALBANY — Linn County Commissioners Roger Nyquist, Sherrie Spenger and Will Tucker agreed Tuesday morning that helping young people find jobs this summer is more important than ever and doubled the amount of money area employers can be reimbursed for hiring first-time employees.

The Youth Wage Grant Program started almost 20 years ago and provides area employers a \$2 per hour stipend for each young person they employ.

This summer, those employers can qualify for \$4 per hour.

The program was on hold in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, commissioners noted.

“There were so many unknowns last year,” Nyquist said. “This is a great opportunity for young people and it will help small businesses find help.”

In 2018 there were 44 youth participants who worked 14,409 hours. In 2019 there were 49 participants who worked 11,437 hours. Qualified reimbursements were \$238,217 and \$22,874 respectively.

Nyquist said he hopes to see as many as 250 young people participate this summer.

He estimated that based on the \$4 per hour stipend, total cost to the county would be about \$500,000, but he believes that money would be reimbursed through the federal CARES program.

“This is definitely economic development,” Nyquist said.

Over its tenure, the program has been paid for with Oregon Lottery funding targeted for economic development.

Tucker said it will be great to see kids get back to work” and Sprenger said she has long supported this type of work education effort.

Examples of employer participants in 2019 include Blue Moon Farms near Lebanon, Toki Teriyaki in Albany, The Coffee Hut in Sweet Home, Roger Ruckert Farms in Tangent and Dairy Queen in Sweet Home.

In other business the commissioners:

— Agreed to hire the Portland law firm of Davis Wright Tremaine to oppose a lawsuit filed recently by seven environmental groups that would halt salvage logging on the Santiam State Forest.

Specifically, in 2019, John DiLorenzo of Davis Wright Tremaine successfully represented Linn County and several dozen other counties and taxing districts in a \$1 billion breach of contract lawsuit against the Oregon Department of Forestry.

Members of the lawsuit successfully argued that the state had failed to live up to decades-old contracts that the more than 700,000 acres of state forestlands were to be managed for the greatest permanent value.

The commissioners agreed that the best response is to harvest the damaged trees within two years, because after that, their value decreases due to pest infestations.

Tucker said Marion and Clackamas counties are invited to participate in the litigation.

Tucker said the current plan is to remove a significant number of trees over the next two years, then roll back harvesting for the next seven to 10 years.

— Discussed the need for timely mental health providers as adults and young people deal with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their daily lives. The discussion came about because four Linn County residents with mental health issues committed suicide last month.

Public Health Director Todd Noble said Linn County provides mental health services 24/7 and if someone is in crisis, services are within 24 hours.

Nyquist said the loss of the four lives “affects hundreds of people and we are all especially concerned about children.”

Nyquist asked if the county has the “bandwidth and resources” to compile an analysis of the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and lack of in-school programs on young people?

Nyquist said he would like to see a “data-driven discussion about the trade-offs and consequences” of the current situation and share that information with school districts.

In keeping with that discussion, the county approved hiring an epidemiologist whose job will include compiling such local data.

- Approved an updated policy that prohibits discrimination, harassment and bullying in the workplace.
- Approved an intergovernmental agreement with the Department of Transportation to make improvements on North River Drive between Pleasant Valley Road and Foster Dam. Total project cost is estimated at \$3,143,555 and Linn County would be reimbursed \$2,820,712 by the federal government.

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