

VENETA CITY COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY



Title/Topic: Lane County Sheriff's Office Full-Time Sergeant Position Proposal

Meeting Date: October 14, 2024

Department: Law Enforcement

Staff Contact: Matt Michel, City Administrator

Email: mmichel@ci.veneta.or.us

Telephone Number: 541-935-2018

ISSUE STATEMENT

Should the Veneta City Council direct staff to amend the current law enforcement services intergovernmental agreement with Lane County to increase the scope of work from a half-time sergeant to a full-time sergeant?

BACKGROUND

The City of Veneta has traditionally contracted with the Lane County Sheriff's Office (LCSO) for law enforcement services. The City of Veneta's agreement with the LCSO secures the full-time services of four deputy sheriffs, one half-time sergeant, and any associated equipment and training necessary to provide law enforcement services.

Over the years, Veneta elected officials have expressed a desire to increase the half-time sergeant to a full-time sergeant. However, city revenues and the Lane County Sheriff's Office staffing capacity were obstacles to putting that desire into action. Those obstacles are no longer insurmountable.

The City's Public Safety Fee enacted in 2021 creates a flexible funding mechanism to manage revenues for public safety expenditures including law enforcement services. Additionally, Sheriff Cliff Harrold recently expressed his office's availability to provide a full-time sergeant for the Veneta contract. At the September 9th City Council meeting, Staff shared these changed circumstances with the City Council. The Council by consensus directed staff to report at the October 14th council meeting on expanding the Lane County Sheriff's Office Veneta sergeant position from half-time to full-time.

This memo will provide funding options in support of amending the law enforcement agreement to provide a full-time sergeant. This memo also addresses local business owners' concerns about Veneta's public safety service challenges.

The current law enforcement services agreement totals \$1,079,656 for July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025. Lane County estimates that changing the sergeant role from half-time to full-time would result in a monthly addition of roughly \$10,191.

Making additional funds available would likely require an interfund loan in the current 2024-2025 fiscal year. One or both of Veneta's two enterprise funds, Water or Sewer, could float the short-term loan. The loan could be repaid in the following 2025-2026 fiscal year, along with budgeting for the additional law enforcement agreement costs from the Law Enforcement Fund's unappropriated ending fund balance. The Law Enforcement Fund has roughly

\$300,000 in unappropriated ending fund balance that could be used as short-term operations gap funding, but is not a long-term funding solution. Much of that balance serves as cash on hand for the July and October quarterly payments due prior to the lump sum receipt of city property taxes in November from the county assessor.

Permanent funding for the City's law enforcement agreement would require increasing the Public Safety Fee by five dollars to eleven dollars per month. This is based on a one dollar Fee increase equating to roughly \$25,000 in additional revenue. Depending on the growth of tax receipts—recall that the City Council's current policy is to cap the use of property taxes for public safety purposes at 50%—increasing the Public Safety Fee could be done incrementally. Every budget season staff would forecast revenues and expenses and, as required under the Public Safety Fee policy, report to the City Council any funding gap that could be addressed by increasing the Public Safety Fee.

For example, the Council could plan to increase the Public Safety Fee by two dollars each year, while covering any remaining gap with unappropriated balance or interfund loan. This could continue until either the unappropriated fund balance is deemed prudently unavailable or when property tax receipts grow sufficiently over time to cover the funding gap.

PUBLIC SAFETY SERVICE CHALLENGES

The City of Veneta contracts with the Lane County Sheriff's Office as an alternative to providing law enforcement services through a city police department. A key difference between contracting and an internal police service appears to be that the latter provides a better opportunity for 24/7 law enforcement coverage. However, costs and personnel/hiring matters can negate, or enhance, that opportunity for 24/7 coverage.

For example, the City of St. Helens, Oregon (population 15,009) recently moved away from 24/7 city police department coverage due to both cost and personnel matters. In contrast, the City of Estacada states in its 2024-2025 budget document that "...Estacada will be at nearly 24-hour coverage with the East County Deputies being available for calls in any of the gap times." This could be due to the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office's own funding capacity to provide extended on-call patrol coverage deep into the county, unlike the Lane County Sheriff's Office's chronic budget constraints.

The cost of providing law enforcement services through a city police department was explored by the City in 2015 as part of a potential Fern Ridge Community Policing District. About that same time Creswell, with a similar sized LCSO contract, estimated the cost of having an equivalent staffed city police force to be around \$1.3 million.

Now nearly ten years later, a recent survey of similar-sized Oregon cities' public safety budgets—law enforcement, code enforcement, courts—indicates that the City of Veneta's agreement with LCSO is both affordable and reasonable.

The table below shows the City of Veneta's public safety costs over the three most recent fiscal years:

TABLE 1: City of Veneta Public Safety Costs

	2024-2025 <i>Budgeted</i>	2023-2024 <i>Budgeted</i>	2022-2023 <i>Actual</i>
Code Enf. Personnel Services Total	\$ 69,300	\$ 101,100	\$ 53,307
Code Enf. Materials & Services Total	\$ 39,300	\$ 15,000	\$ 16,773
Law Enf. Materials & Services Total	\$ 1,091,056	\$ 1,028,400	\$ 974,056
Court Personnel Services Total	\$ 61,300	\$ 56,700	\$ 49,501
Court Materials & Services Total	\$ 16,700	\$ 17,300	\$ 14,019
Court Capital Outlay Total	\$ 0	\$ 2,700	\$ 0
SUBTOTAL	\$ 1,277,656	\$ 1,221,200	\$ 1,107,656
Year-to-Year Change	+ \$ 56,456	+ \$ 133,544	

The table below shows composite public safety costs of Oregon cities with a population similar to Veneta's (population 5,261). Two cities (Junction City, Philomath) have internal police departments, while two cities (Creswell, Estacada) contract with the county sheriff (noted in gray):

TABLE 2: Comparison Cities' Public Safety Budgets

	Population (April 2024)	Staffing	2024-2025 Budgeted (less Contingency)
Junction City	7,427	10 Sworn, 6 non-sworn	Court & Public Safety Depts. \$ 3,674,600
Philomath	5,823	10 Sworn, 2.5 non-sworn	Court & Police Depts. \$ 2,217,436
Creswell	5,823	<i>LCSO Contract:</i> 1.0 Sergeant, 4.0 Patrol Deputies	\$ 1,470,294
Estacada	5,750	<i>Clackamas Co. SO Contract:</i> 0.15 Sergeant, 2.0 Patrol Deputies, 1.0 SRO/Patrol	\$ 1,425,550

The tables above illustrate that it would require at least another one million dollars in public safety funding to access 24/7 policing coverage, whether by creating a city police department or in partnership with the Lane County Sheriff's Office.

Veneta's current property taxes bring in just under two million dollars with 50% going towards public safety. In the current fiscal year Veneta's public safety funding is mostly comprised of \$956,800 in property taxes, \$152,000 in Public Safety Fees, and \$33,800 in marijuana sales

taxes. Adding another one million dollars to the revenue stream would likely need to come from increasing the Public Safety Fee by \$40 to \$46/month.

Meanwhile, what the City and local businesses are learning is that there are other options to a 24/7 police coverage. Collaborating on self-help measures such as cameras, enlisting the help of the Fern Ridge Neighborhood Watch group, and random LSCO coverage during gap hours are positive steps being pursued to make Veneta a safe place to live and do business.

RELATED CITY POLICIES

Veneta Municipal Code Chapter 3.45 (Public Safety Fee)

Resolution No. 1412 (2024), establishing a Public Safety Fee amount

COUNCIL OPTIONS

1. Direct staff to amend the current law enforcement services intergovernmental agreement with Lane County to increase the scope of work from a half-time sergeant to a full-time sergeant, and bring forward an interfund loan to pay for the incremental cost.
2. Direct staff to amend the current law enforcement services intergovernmental agreement with Lane County to increase the scope of work from a half-time sergeant to a full-time sergeant, and bring forward a funding proposal as directed by Council.
3. Direct staff to amend the current law enforcement services intergovernmental agreement with Lane County as directed by Council.
4. Take no action to amend the current law enforcement services intergovernmental agreement with Lane County.

CITY ADMINISTRATOR'S RECOMMENDATION

Option #1: Direct staff to amend the current law enforcement services intergovernmental agreement with Lane County to increase the scope of work from a half-time sergeant to a full-time sergeant, and bring forward an interfund loan to pay for the incremental cost.

SUGGESTED MOTION

"I make a motion to direct staff to amend the current law enforcement services intergovernmental agreement with Lane County to increase the scope of work from a half-time sergeant to a full-time sergeant, and bring forward an interfund loan to pay for the incremental cost."

ATTACHMENTS

None