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MEDIA RELEASE

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SHERIFF RESPONDS TO INACCURACIES FROM A LINCOLN COUNTY STATEMENT TO YACHATSNEWS

On May 16, 2024, [YachatsNews published a story](#) including a Lincoln County statement by County PIO Kenneth Lipp, on the current discussions over a proposed agreement with the cities of Waldport and Yachats for enhanced patrol deputy services. This proposal would be an updated agreement for Waldport and a new agreement for Yachats. This was addressed in my [April 22, 2024 memorandum to the Lincoln County Board of Commissioners \(BOC\)](#) where I outlined the details of the proposed partnership and requested time on their agenda to review and discuss this topic. In the [Lincoln County statement](#), there are several inaccuracies I need to address and clarify for the citizens of Lincoln County.

I first want to point out the positive movement on this partnership. As of May 16, 2024, following a meeting with County Administrator Tim Johnson, City Manager Dan Cutter, City Manager Bobbi Price, and a Sheriff's Office representative, this proposal appears to be moving forward. We will begin working on a draft agreement for the governing bodies of the County and Cities for further discussion.

The "[Lincoln County statement to YachatsNews](#)", appears to be the Board of Commissioners statement. It does not directly indicate it is from the County Commissioner's office, but it is assumed based on statements from BOC chair Commissioner Casey Miller.

The first paragraph indicates Lincoln County has contracted with the city of Waldport for patrol services since 2004, this is incorrect. We have provided the City of Waldport with patrol services since July 1, 1997.

Lincoln County Sheriff's Office

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Additionally, it indicates that “County administration – the Chair of the Board of Commissioners, County Counsel and the County Administrator – typically make collaborative decisions on whether an item is placed on the commission’s agenda. Current Chair Casey Miller felt that more information was needed from County Administrator Tim Johnson, who was on leave until a few days ago, to adequately consider the matter”.

In response to my memo requesting to be on the May 1 BOC agenda to discuss this matter, I was told by County Administrator Tim Johnson that 2 of the 3 commissioners did not want to discuss this at the BOC meeting. It is important to point out that Commissioner Kaety Jacobson was out of the office on vacation and the two commissioners he was referring to were Commissioner Claire Hall and Commissioner Casey Miller. I had been discussing this with County Administrator Tim Johnson by phone while he was not in the office, so he was available during his leave time.

The goal of requesting to be on the agenda with the BOC was to provide them with further information, answer any questions they may have had, and to allow them to make an informed decision on the matter. Both of the city managers had planned on being present and available for any questions at this meeting. Neither Commissioner Hall nor Commissioner Miller reached out by email, phone, or in person to ask me any questions related to this matter. I was advised by Administrator Johnson the commissioners did not want this topic on the agenda and would not be considering this issue.

Commissioner Jacobson contacted me on April 27, 2024 upon her return to inquire further about the agenda request and indicated she would ask County Administrator Tim Johnson to further work with me on this proposal.

On April 29, 2024, I let Waldport city manager Dann Cutter and Yachats city manager Bobbi Price know that the BOC would not be discussing this proposal at the May 1, 2024 BOC meeting and it appeared the BOC did not support this moving forward. I did let them know that Administrator Johnson had some more information on the reasoning and would be discussing it further with me.

On May 7, 2024 I met with Administrator Johnson for 2.5 hours to discuss this additional information. Administrator Johnson indicated the Commissioners did not support moving this forward as proposed and indicated that the cities would need to pay the full cost for contracting services with the Sheriff's Office. On May 8, 2024, I advised City Manager Dann Cutter and City Manager Bobbi Price that the Commissioners did not support the proposal and I provided them with options to move forward that would require them to pay the full cost of contracting or to reduce services.

The BOC have always known they can reach out individually to me anytime regarding concerns or questions they may have and have done so in the past on many topics. Only Commissioner Jacobson contacted me, yet Commissioners Miller and Hall decided not to place this issue on the agenda. In fact, Commissioner Jacobson has continued to stay in contact with me regarding this topic since her return from vacation.

The statement indicates Commissioner Miller “was surprised to see Landers’ proposal after all department heads were asked to reduce their General Fund asks due to increased budget pressures.” The current general fund budget for the Sheriff’s Office does not accurately represent what is being spent. Our liability insurance is one example, the BOC made a decision to take the liability insurance out of each County department or office’s budget/s, which I don’t disagree with for accurately documenting how much each department is paying for insurance. However, the BOC approved to incorrectly underbudget this amount for the Sheriff’s Office by an estimate of around \$500,000 in this current year.

The BOC also approved a decision, proposed by the County Finance Department, not to budget any overtime in the Sheriff’s Office budget for working on holidays. Our deputies are required to work holidays in the jail and on patrol to serve you. Not budgeting these costs will be an estimated \$200,000 deficiency in the current budget. These are a couple of the larger budget concerns I have. To reflect the true costs, , I have correctly changed this for approval by the budget committee for our next year’s proposed budget

The statement indicated, “During recent years, personnel costs have increased substantially for deputies, who received approximately twice the cost-of-living adjustments as other county employees under their labor agreement.” I feel this is a direct attack on our deputies and public safety in the County. To bring them in on this issue is sad. It is true, the Lincoln County Deputies Association did receive, through the collective bargaining process which resulted in a binding arbitration agreement, a 5% cost of living adjustment for July 2022 to June 2023 and an additional 5% cost of living adjustment for July 2023 through June 2024.

I supported this cost of living for our deputies, but the decision was ultimately made by the arbitrator because the Lincoln County Deputies Association and Board of Commissioners did not reach an agreement. The other county bargaining units cost of living adjustments were already set through their agreements and they were not up for bargaining at the same time as the deputies’ agreement. The cost of living was over 9% at this time and I supported this to pay deputies in comparison to other police agencies in our county which all received substantial cost of living adjustments to keep up with inflation.

The statement indicated that County Administrator Tim Johnson asked me to provide information on how this proposal could fit within the budget or what reductions I would recommend to support this contract and stated that I have not provided this information. This is untrue. I have worked with Administrator Johnson and Commissioner Jacobson on this agreement. I have answered all of the questions they have provided, unless I didn't know the answer. I have met with Administrator Johnson multiple times to work on this, including one meeting lasting two and a half hours. I want to reiterate that I wanted to discuss this at a BOC meeting with the commissioner to further address any questions they have, which they refused to do.

The last statement indicated that "Requiring residents of the unincorporated areas to subsidize a contract with cities would set a dangerous precedent and constitute a misuse of taxpayer funds." I am not proposing to, nor have I ever misused taxpayer funds. This proposal was a way to maximize our taxpayer dollar and increase public safety in the County with the help of our city partners. Everyone would benefit from this proposal. I view it as an unique way to spread our deputy coverage for the benefit of all Lincoln County community members by adding an additional deputy at a very low cost to augment the general fund. I also indicated this would be a trial year to see how it works and to determine if we are seeing the benefits. I stated I would absorb the additional cost in my general budget due to current and anticipated vacancy savings in other divisions of my office. It is not a long-term solution to do this, but it would give us a chance to evaluate it in the trial year.

We do have agreements with the city of Depoe Bay and the Confederated Tribe of Siletz Indians. We also have a taxing district for the Siletz rural enhanced law enforcement district. Each of these are separate agreements and stand on their own. They are unique agreements and the guidelines we follow are different for each area. We have not drafted the agreement for the South County partnership, but it will look different than Depoe Bay's agreement. The difference will allow more flexibility for the Sheriff's office to schedule our deputies in Waldport and Yachats and in the general south county area which is already covered by the Sheriff's Office. This agreement will be different than the Depoe Bay and Siletz contracts in that it will help other areas by ultimately lowering response times and improving overall public safety.

My duty as the Sheriff is to provide law enforcement coverage in the cities and unincorporated areas regardless whether a city has a police department or contracts for enhanced services. If Waldport does not renew their agreement, I am still required to provide that service, but with two fewer deputies. Without these contracts, our service would be severely reduced and that would be a dangerous precedent to consider.

I continue to work with the cities and our tribal partners for law enforcement coverage. During my meetings with Administrator Johnson, we discovered indirect cost allocations charged to the cities was too high, exceeding 18%. The cities were subsidizing the County's budget and I have not supported this. The County does provide additional services for additional deputies, but did not increase any staffing as a result of this. I proposed we eliminate these additional costs to the cities and Administrator Johnson agreed. We are proposing to eliminate these costs for the city of Depoe Bay, the Siletz Tribe, Waldport and for our taxing district.

My proposal was a recommendation that I supported to the BOC. The BOC has ultimate authority to approve or not approve funding recommendations and increases/decreases in the number of employees in my office. My only ask was to openly discuss this so I could provide them with information to make their decision. I would accept their decision either way.

I continue to look for innovative solutions to add public safety capacity and improved efficiencies. One example in the jail is restructuring our team by eliminating three certified deputy positions and adding four non-certified technicians. This was at a cost savings estimated at \$10,000 a year to the County but increases our team in the jail.

I am pleased to see this proposal moving forward for further discussion. It was important for me to address these inaccuracies for transparency purposes within my office as I have always done and will continue to do to support public safety in our County.

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