

Testimony #1

I am a resident of Ashland and an attorney by profession. Through my professional experience in both criminal and civil rights law, I have seen repeatedly how good-intentioned police responses can escalate certain situations to injurious and sometimes deadly consequences, particularly in the case of a mentally ill person in crisis.

I have recently learned about the CAHOOTS program operating in the Eugene-Springfield Metro area. As an Ashland resident I would like to see something similar implemented here, and paid for with a moderate reduction of the police budget, which I have been informed is at \$7.5 million dollars and 46% of the total public safety budget.

I firmly believe that a partial re-focusing of resources away from policing and punishment, and toward mental health services and programs like CAHOOTS will ultimately increase public safety in our town for all residents and visitors. If an exact model of the CAHOOTS program is not the best option for Ashland, then we should work toward implementing a similar program to best address the specific needs of our community.

Thank you.

-Lindsay Sweet

Testimony #2

Councilors and Mayor,

Since you are proposing to do a financial review of Ashland Fire and Rescue, I strongly urge you to include in that financial review the Ashland Police Department.

Given the movement of current events, it seems like the prudent thing to do. Several non-profits and citizens are asking that the police department find funding for "Cahoots" services in Ashland. Now seems to be the most efficacious time to do this.

A financial review of APD would show where in their budget funding for Cahoots could be found.

Dr. Carol Voisin
Ashland

Testimony #3

Please also, as you consider options, the CAHOOTS(whitebirdclinic.org) program in the Eugene-Springfield, OR, area.

"Instead it's about moving away from a narrow conception of public safety that relies on policing and punishment, and investing in community's actual safety net, things like stable housing, mental health services, and community organization." John Oliver, Last Week Tonight

"Defunding the police would reduce public spending on police departments, potentially resulting in fewer cops and more money available to spend on other services that would lead to reductions in crime." Bruce Golding, New York Post

The City is losing revenue, and we know cuts must be made.

Regarding the police department, it must also take cuts.

As the last four officers were hired, it was always questionable as to whether Ashland has the level of crime which justified the hiring of those officers. That was in good budget times.

And now we have fewer summer visitors due to smoke, and COVID-19.

I suggest prioritizing attention to non-law enforcement solutions to houseless-ness, addiction and mental health. Let us look to community-based responses to these and other nuisance or crime-related problems that are cheaper and more effective than law enforcement.

Jobs, job creation, and keeping businesses alive are also important. If we don't have people working and paying those city taxes, even more budget cuts will be necessary. Lots of money now spent on police needs to be spent on keeping the economy of Ashland alive. And the TOT(Transient Occupancy Tax)is part of what pays for police at this time. The hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, and so forth, need a break now. Before they close their doors.

Public health, including the health of unemployed, under-employed, and houseless people needs some focus. We are only as safe in times of pandemic as our poorest neighbors and essential workers.

We need to re-imagine Ashland, the budget, and how much Ashland spends on law enforcement.

Jim Yarbrough

Testimony #4

Mayor and Council,

Crap, it's Monday morning and I need to crank out this Public Forum letter before 10 AM for absolutely no discernable reason.

I did appreciate that the Public Forum process was reiterated verbally during the last meeting. Thank you for that and I hope it continues. Now I am suggesting that...

... in the minutes, if there have been no Public Forum e-mail submissions, please state that in writing.

In the minutes of May 5th and May 18th (also in study sessions) there was no link to Public Forum submissions so I have to assume that there were none. That seems unlikely, but how is one to know?

I look forward to the new Jensen/Graham communication strategy of mimicking what I've done at the Plaza Information booth on all Ashland grocery store windows. Also excited for the Mayor's new Ashland Weekly Update to be posted on the city website, facebook page, grocery stores, the "Jim"formation Booth, and in the Daily Tidings. That's going to be awesome.

Stay safe and sane. Thanks for doing all the things, little and big, that you are being unappreciated for.

Jim Falkenstein

Ashland

Testimony #5

Dear Ashland City Council,

I am emailing today to request that City Council reassess the allocation of funds for the Public Safety Budget, and reallocate funding away from APD and toward mental health and crisis prevention services. I urge Ashland City Council to adopt the Cahoots model (based in Eugene), that funds alternative services in crisis situations, and responds to 20% of 911 calls. We must significantly reduce policing budgets so we can fund other civil services.

Thank you,
Emily Greenblatt

Testimony #6

ACES

**Ashland Citizens for Economic
Sustainability
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June 15, 2020

Dear Mayor Stromberg and City Council:

Based on an optimistic forecast of revenues and federal relief funds, what the city has proposed is a short-term solution that does not tackle the city's long-term budgetary crisis. It is yet another attempt to put a band-aid on the structural deficit which the council refuses to address. Instead of making some difficult but necessary decisions you continue to just kick the budgetary can down the road and at the same time, providing little to no relief for Ashland citizens and local business.

First, the plan relies on unrealistic assumptions of cost savings in the police and fire departments. According to the most recent quarterly report, the department expenditures are close to or equal to budgetary goals, with overtime costs in the Fire Department running above budget.

In the spring AFR Chief Shepherd said AFR is at minimum staffing while publicly stating at the city's cost cut ad-hoc committee meetings that he needs to hire three more fire paramedics by next biennium, if the ambulance service is retained. The budget he presented shows the hires will cost an additional \$600,000 per year. To say the city will achieve savings of \$395,000 in the police personnel budget line and \$260,00 in the fire department personnel line will be extremely difficult and optimistic at best. No plan was presented on how the projected savings will be achieved.

Second, the outlined plan continues to draw down fund balances to pay debt to keep the lights on in the city. These funds have been collected from city ratepayers for specific projects or needed city repairs. Rather than addressing excessive departmental costs the city continues to rob Peter to pay Paul. In the past few years the city raided the Reserve Fund to bail out the Health Care Fund, took funds in the Reserve Fund to bail out AFN and raided the Facilities Maintenance Funds to bail out the Central Service Fund - which resulted in the City's failed \$8.2ml City Hall Bond this April.

In this plan, the city draws upon the following three other funds instead of making meaningful cuts in city expenses:

- It is suggested that balances in the Wastewater Fund to pay the portion of the wastewater treatment plant debt service that is now not covered by the Food and Beverage tax. It is irresponsible to divert any of the meals tax for Street Maintenance and reconstruction. This is not what voters approved and any change would de-legitimize the election process that established this policy.

- A one-time budget transfer of \$553,000 from the Cemetery Trust Fund to pay for current expenses that may violate the trust agreement and will definitely increase general fund expenditures in future years. A transfer to cover expenses in the current budget means that cemetery expenses in the future will have to come out of the general fund.
- De-committing restricted reserves of \$900,000 from the Parking Fund meant for future parking supply to cover some of the shortfall from TOT revenues.

ACES strongly suggests the Council begin addressing the underlining budgetary issues with longer term solutions. Patching over problems and using budget gimmicks hasn't worked in the past and simply is not the answer. What needs to be addressed is Ashland has three times the number of city staff compared to other Oregon cities our size and salary and benefit costing taxpayers nearly \$140,000 per staff. A level that is excessive when compared with other cities and not sustainable for the Ashland taxpayer who forced to pay the bill.