

**2-15-2017**

Judge Shaffer called a special session of the Gilliam County Court to order at 3:00 p.m. The meeting was held at the Gilliam County Courthouse in Condon, Oregon. Present were Judge Steve Shaffer and Commissioner Michael Weimar.

### **IN THE MATTER OF WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Judge Shaffer welcomed those in attendance and explained that the purpose of the Special Session was to appoint a Commissioner to fill the vacancy on the Court created by the recent death of Commissioner Dennis Gronquist. He introduced two of the nominees, Leslie Wetherell of Arlington and Elizabeth Farrar of Condon. A third nominee, Ruben Wetherell, was not in attendance.

### **IN THE MATTER OF BRIEF EXPLANATION OF THE PROCESS**

Judge Shaffer explained that pursuant to Oregon State Law, the remaining members of the County Court shall appoint a person qualified to perform the duties of the position until the vacancy is filled by election in 2018. Further, he explained that the new commissioner would be selected from three nominees (noted in above paragraph), who were selected by the Gilliam County Democratic Central Committee at a meeting Saturday, Feb. 11. The names were ranked forwarded to the Court by the County Clerk.

The process of the Special Session, Judge Shaffer explained, would consist of a short presentation by each nominee, followed by an opportunity to answer questions presented by Judge Shaffer and Commissioner Weimar, and additional questions presented by audience members. At that point, nominees would be given an opportunity to add brief final comments before the Court made a final decision for appointment.

### **IN THE MATTER OF SHORT PRESENTATIONS BY NOMINEES**

**Leslie Wetherell** spoke first, outlining her education and experience. She stressed that she would be an advocate for the entire County, working to promote industry, jobs and housing to create growth and prosperity.

**Elizabeth Farrar** outlined her experience with State and Federal government, noting that she is committed to working with the entire County and all Eastern Oregon communities.

### **IN THE MATTER OF QUESTIONS BY COUNTY COURT MEMBERS**

Commissioner Weimar:

Q. What do you see as the role of County Government?

**Elizabeth Farrar:** Set a vision to establish policies and budget priorities, consider ways to create vitality of communities and individuals, look at housing and infrastructure, serve as a collective voice for the people of Gilliam County, serve as advocate at the State and Federal level and encourage every member of the staff to work in the best interest of the County.

**Leslie Wetherell:** Lead by example, provide public services, including public health and mental health to create better communities. Approve budgets, set land use policies, negotiate contracts, and create policies to help the County Court and other elected officials do their jobs efficiently.

Q. How much time to you think this part-time job will require?

**Leslie Wetherell:** Unsure of the time required for budget committee meetings and other external meetings, including meetings in the community, but she is prepared for a substantial time commitment.

**Elizabeth Farrar:** As much time as it takes to do the job well, including being accessible to voters on both ends of the County, and possibly holding regular office hours in each City.

Q. What is your strongest asset?

**Leslie Wetherell:** Ability to see the big picture, working well and getting along with others.

**Elizabeth Farrar:** Intellectual capacity to understand a broad range of issues and grasp complex subjects.

Judge Shaffer:

Q. What do you think are the most critical issues facing Gilliam County today?

**Leslie Wetherell:** The Metro contract, which is critical for jobs and revenues; and completion of fiber project.

**Elizabeth Farrar:** Most pressing is to consider critical barriers to economic development and create an environment that allows economic development to flourish, i.e. fiber will support alumni who want to come home, and housing is an ongoing issue. Questioned whether the Court's current three-commissioner structure is really working for the County, maybe consider a five-member Court.

Q. Regarding relationships at the State and Federal Level, what are ways you would work with them – Multnomah County for example?

**Elizabeth Farrar:** AOC and other organizations can help bridge the gap. In terms of developing relationships, she is doing that in her current work, and has maintained relationships established in the past.

**Leslie Wetherell:** She hasn't developed relationships at the state and federal level yet, but doesn't see it as a problem since she is outgoing and not afraid to ask questions.

## **IN THE MATTER OF QUESTIONS BY AUDIENCE MEMBERS**

Sandy McKay:

Q. The County Court is involved in a lot of things, including infrastructure, health care and education. Where do you think the Court has fallen down?

**Elizabeth Farrar:** Fiber in Condon is critical for current residents and new people. Problems need to be solved ASAP.

**Leslie Wetherell:** She hasn't been involved, but in reading the Minutes, realizes that the fiber project seems stalled and needs more work. All involved parties need to compromise and move in the right direction.

Sheriff Gary Bettencourt:

Q. What do you think are the roles of other elected officials and what are your thoughts on the importance of the County Court communicating with the other elected officials on decisions they make that affect the other offices?

**Leslie Wetherell:** She will learn their roles by visiting with everybody.

**Elizabeth Farrar:** Important to maintain lines of communication and coordinate efforts as much as possible.

Q. What do you see as the scope of Public Safety, which is one of the most costly services provided by the County?

**Elizabeth Farrar:** Our Public Safety officials are doing a good job. Need to set budget priorities to reflect the importance of Public Safety and determine the best ways to meet needs of the Department.

**Leslie Wetherell:** It's a big job and certain expenses can't be avoided.

Rachel Weinstein:

Q. Dennis Gronquist left large shoes to fill. He was able to get to the heart of any matter and ask intelligent questions; but now, there are North/South concerns. What makes you best qualified, and how would you put those concerns at rest?

**Leslie Wetherell:** She has lived in Arlington more than 40 years and got to know a lot of people from both ends of the County during her employment with the City of Arlington.

**Elizabeth Farrar:** The person in the position must be accessible and able to understand the feedback of constituents in the entire County. Ensure people have opportunities to weigh in about what matters to them.

Les Ruark:

Q. What would you do to improve transparency?

**Leslie Wetherell:** She is well versed in public meeting laws, which must be followed. Make sure Executive Sessions are appropriate. She approves of the Court's plan to make Court meeting packets available.

**Elizabeth Farrar:** She is happy to hear about the Court's plan to provide packets as meetings are difficult to follow without information. Consider changing the way Minutes are posted online. Look at better ways to include discussion items in the Agenda and give the Public more information without compromising efficiency.

Q. How would you work with the Road Department?

**Leslie Wetherell:** She plans to communicate with the Road Department regarding needs and issues.

**Elizabeth Farrar:** She will be happy to work with the Road Department.

Roadmaster Dewey Kennedy:

Q. Do you have a vision regarding our aging infrastructure?

**Leslie Wetherell:** Doesn't have an agenda, but has an open mind and will learn.

**Elizabeth Farrar:** Lives on a County Road and understands their importance. Look for ways to provide funding and make sure money is in place for the Road Department to do its job.

## **IN THE MATTER OF THIRD NOMINEE**

Judge Shaffer reported that Ruben Wetherell was unable to attend the Special Session. He then read Wetherell's letter and resume'.

## **IN THE MATTER OF AOC COUNTY COLLEGE**

Judge Shaffer told nominees that AOC provides a County College for new commissioners and high-level staff members regarding economic development, finance, public works and public safety. He asked Farrar and Wetherell if they would be willing to attend, and both responded that they would make the commitment.

## **IN THE MATTER OF FINAL COMMENTS**

**Elizabeth Farrar** thanked the Court and reiterated that her background in public policy on the County, State and Federal level make her uniquely qualified.

**Leslie Wetherell** explained that she has experience in human resources, supervising, accounting, insurance, and administrative functions, as well as large infrastructure projects, in her employment with the City of Arlington, and as Operations Manager for Maryhill Museum.

## **IN THE MATTER OF RECESS**

Judge Shaffer concluded this portion of the Session, and called for a brief recess.

## **IN THE MATTER OF COUNTY COURT DECISION**

Commissioner Weimar commented that either candidate would do a good job, and noted that the Democratic Central Committee submitted three names, ranked in order of preference, for the Court's consideration.

**MOTION** by Commissioner Weimar to appoint Leslie Wetherell to fill the empty position on the Gilliam County Court.

In response, Judge Shaffer said he believes Elizabeth Farrar would be the best candidate, and that it isn't a north/south issue, but an issue affecting the entire County. He commented that Gilliam County is a Frontier County and that enticing new business requires solid working relationships with other entities in order to "carry who we are to other people throughout the State." However, he stated a willingness to listen and negotiate on the selection.

Commissioner Weimar said he is sure Leslie Wetherell can step up to the plate in that capacity. Although it's important to have a view of the entire County, she knows the "lay of the land in the north end." He also noted that the Gilliam County Central Committee was charged with bringing the best candidate before the Court, and that Wetherell was ranked highest of the three.

Judge Shaffer agreed that it's important to put trust in the Committee's decision.

Gary Miller was in the audience and asked what happens if the vote is split. Judge Shaffer explained that the position would remain vacant until Dec. 31, 2018. He also noted that the deadline for selection is the Feb. 22, and that a decision isn't required until that time.

At this point, Judge Shaffer seconded the motion made by Commissioner Weimar to appoint Leslie Wetherell to fill the empty position on the Gilliam County Court. Weimar – Yes; Shaffer – Yes; Motion Passed.

**IN THE MATTER OF PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mac Stinchfield of the Times-Journal commented that this has been a historic day for Gilliam County and that we've witnessed a great thing, beginning with the process of reorganizing the Democratic Central Committee and culminating with the nomination of three highly qualified candidates. Stinchfield thanked the Precinct Committee members and the candidates.

**IN THE MATTER OF SWEARING IN AND OATH OF OFFICE**

In a brief swearing-in ceremony, Judge Shaffer administered the Oath of Office to newly selected Commissioner Leslie Wetherell and presented her with a Certificate of Appointment.

**IN THE MATTER OF THE NEXT COURT MEETING**

The next regular meeting of the Gilliam County Court will be held on Wednesday, March. 1, 2017 beginning at 10:00 a.m. at the Gilliam County Courthouse in Condon.

Judge Shaffer adjourned the special session at 4:45 p.m.

**GILLIAM COUNTY COURT**

By \_\_\_\_\_

Steve Shaffer, Judge

By \_\_\_\_\_

Michael Weimar, Commissioner

Mary H. Dyer/Recorder