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The Olympian

Judge warns of staffing crisis in Thurston County court

BY MARTÍN BILBAO
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Thurston County District Court needs to hire about 17 more staff over two years to mitigate significant slowdowns to court operations, court officials said on Tuesday.

Presiding Judge Brett Buckley introduced the topic during a Board of County Commission-

ers meeting with an apocalyptic metaphor.

“When you look up into the sky, we see this asteroid aiming at District Court, and it’s going to crash down on us and create a giant hole,” Buckley said.

The challenges stem from current workload demands outpacing staff capacity as well as a looming change to a new case management system in 2027, Buckley said. The dire warning

came as the county is facing a \$22.3 million structural deficit in its general fund, the county’s primary operating budget.

To address the deficit, county leaders plan to spread out various cost-cutting measures over three years and take \$1 million annually from its \$4 million rainy day fund, according to county documents.

Given these circumstances, Buckley said he felt “very uncom-



Thurston County

Thurston County District Court needs to hire about 17 more staff over two years to mitigate significant slowdowns to court operations, presiding judge Brett Buckley (right) and court administrator Frankie Peters (left) told county commissioners on Tuesday, Oct. 27, 2026.

fortable” about requesting “a lot of money.” The court needs almost \$1.9 million to bring on 17 more staff, court administrator

Frankie Peters estimated. That includes \$965,000 from

SEE COURT, 5A



GAVIN FEEK gavin.feek@thenewstribune.com

A misty, moist visit to the Mima Mounds in early October yielded mysterious views and jarring gunfire.

Explore Thurston County’s mysterious Mima Mounds

BY GAVIN FEEK
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Roughly 20 miles from Olympia, Washington, near the Capitol State Forest, adjacent to a skeet-shooting and rifle range and beneath a small grove of Garry Oaks and Douglas firs, lie the Mima Mounds, five square miles of them, in a grassland

prairie filled with meadowlarks.

Along with Bigfoot, Mel’s Hole, DB Cooper and lutefisk, the Mima Mounds are some of our region’s biggest mysteries. The Department of Natural Resources describes them as “soil pimples,” and Cascade PBS’ Mossback’s Northwest referred to them as “earth-sculpted goosebumps.”

I visited Mima Mounds last

week, and I’ve decided to call them “furry fescue moguls.” Whichever description you prefer, they truly look like all of those things. The Mima Mounds are exactly that: low, dome-shaped mounds that stretch for over 600 acres across a gilded Thurston County prairie.

Scientists and researchers still don’t know where the heck they came from.

SEE MOUNDS, 3A

A TRIP TO MIMA MOUNDS

From Tacoma, I hopped on I-5 south and reached Mima Mounds Natural Area Preserve in 51 minutes. The National Park Service designated Mima Mounds a National Natural Landmark in 1966, and thanks to the Department of Natural Resources, it became a Natural Area Preserve in 1976. Before that, the Mima Prairie was known as state trust land, which the DNR leased out for cattle grazing.

The original inhabitants of Mima Mounds were the Upper

Thurston deputy cleared in June shooting incident

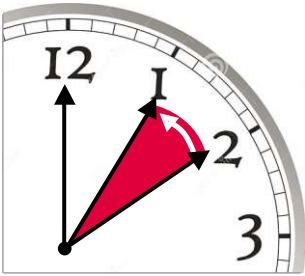
BY MARTÍN BILBAO
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A Thurston County deputy who shot a man during a June 4 incident has been cleared of wrongdoing, Sheriff Derek Sanders announced on social media.

Deputy Vidal Zamora shot Joseph Paul Kochanowski, 68, multiple times just after 9 a.m. June 4 at a property Kochanowski owns on 149th Lane Southeast, which is southeast of Yelm and northeast of Lake Lawrence.

Zamora responded to the property to help Southeast Thurston Fire Authority with a trailer fire, The Olympian previously

SEE DEPUTY, 2A



TIME CHANGE
FALL BACK

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