

Local

Sumpter talks fate of City's Planning Commission

By Meghan Andersch

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A large portion of Tuesday's Sumpter City Council meeting was devoted to discussion regarding dissolving or retaining the City Planning Commission.

Just prior to the meeting, Mayor Melissa Findley announced she had made available information on what is in City funds and imminent deposits, the costs to the City for 2013 and 2014 temporary part-time employees, conditional use permit and zoning permit applications, and a list of actions for which permits are not required.

The minutes of last month's meeting were reviewed with opportunity given for Council and public input. As part of the review, Mayor Findley played an audio clip from February's meeting covering the discussion of the Fire Department restructuring and hiring of a consultant. She stated, "It has come to my attention that there has been an immense amount of gossip and innuendo about those two subjects."

Findley stated she wanted to play the clip to make sure there is no confusion. Minutes were accepted with minor corrections and a change to correct language around the consultant fee.

During the Mayor's Report, Findley said that with the insert in this month's water bill, she was hoping to clearly convey in a single page information about zoning permit and conditional use requests and what is required for each. Mayor Findley asked that attendees read over the information provided this meeting and bring any questions to the next meeting.

Findley reported meeting with officers of the Fire Department on Sunday, 2/15 regarding what was discussed at February's Council meeting. In attendance were Kurt Clarke, John Young, Cary Clarke, Anna Stafford, Jim Sheller, Bob Armbruster, and Melissa Findley. They discussed Young focusing on the Fire and Fire Training side of things as the Fire Coordinator and Stafford focusing on EMS and EMS training as the EMS Coordinator. Findley stated that Young felt strongly about giving up his title of Training Officer and that he will continue to maintain that title as long as he does not stand in Staffords's way of EMS coordinating and training.

Findley said she stated at the meeting with the Fire Department and would reiterate, "Good, bad or indifferent, I am the mayor for the next two years. I will not be held hostage by people who threaten to quit. If you volunteer, be a damn good volunteer and do it for the right reasons. If you threaten to quit, please do and walk away."

Findley shared that Fire Chief Clarke will update job descriptions and that personnel files will be moved to City Hall into locked files.

Findley attended 2/24's Fire Department Auxiliary meeting and asked if they

could help fund the EMS consult and also a grant writer to write only Fire/EMS grants and locate funds for the Fire Department. There would be an initial cost of \$1000 for getting a grant writer to look into available funding, and then a cost of \$99 per hour, if they decide to proceed, with a maximum cap in the agreement. Findley stated the amount would probably be \$2500-3000.

The City is negative \$5,400 in budget, and that though there is a difference between actual and budget funds, Findley is looking for answers as to why. She said she may not understand how a municipality works but is appalled anyone would ever think being in the negative is common. Findley said while getting to answers, the City will be tightening belts. There will be no more part-time hiring without absolute approval of the Council (non emergency) or the Council president or mayor in an emergency.

A job description for Groundskeeper is going out. The City would like to have all applications in by the 24th at noon.

City Recorder Julie McKinney reported the office phones have been ringing off the hook with many people calling in about the flea market. Lots of burn permit applications have also been coming in.

Utility Manager Jeff McKinney reported many challenges in February with freezing, sediment, and run off plugging up the system. He thanked Lee German for filling in while he attended training and stated with the water system full of challenges, it took all of German's experience to keep the City water flowing. McKinney asked for a round of applause for German.

McKinney took 19 classes in five days at the Oregon Association of Water Utilities Conference last week. McKinney entered the town in the Statewide Water Contest. Sumpter has a surface water system and won first place in that category. Judging criteria include clarity, taste, etc. McKinney plans to enter the next round against the winner of the ground water category. The winner of that round has the chance to go to the national competition in Washington DC to compete for the best water in the country.

The Fire Chief's Report was given by Jim Sheller. He reported one medical call out for the month. Stafford provided EMR training on backboards on the third Tuesday in February with 10 EMR and Fire Department volunteers in attendance. At the last Fire Department meeting, lighting systems on all trucks were checked. A new hose reel has been put on the brush truck. Sheller reported Cary Clarke and John Young are coordinating with ODFW to plan ahead as a rough fire season is expected. Around the first of April, Young will be providing Fireman I training, with six signed up for the class.

Young reported that he attended Wildland Forest Fire training and is putting

together material to teach all firefighters skills for "initial size up" to assist in accurate reporting and making sure necessary resources and back up are received. Young stated Baker Rural Fire Department is already talking about two pasture fires that got away from landowners. Steve Boles, from the Powder River Rural Fire Department, reported four or five calls already in the last two weeks.

Dan Patton gave the Planning Commission Report. The Commission talked last Thursday about a defensible space plan for individual homes, which would include guidelines for clearing back property of easily combustible matter. He agreed to provide that plan by the next Council meeting. The commission unanimously approved a zoning permit for Schmidt to cover an existing walkway between buildings. They requested a plot plan on a conditional use permit application for Armbruster. The public hearing on that application will take place during the next Planning Commission meeting. The Commission voted unanimously that John Young be approved to continue as project manager of Volunteer Park and that Council immediately approve Young to be on the Planning Commission as per his application.

Findley briefly recapped that she, at February's Council meeting, asked to not add anyone to the Planning Commission, and to have the Commission pulled back into Council for the temporary foreseeable future. She stated the Commission has not provided minutes for every meeting and has problems keeping a full committee.

There ensued a spirited and intense discussion of the matter, with much input from Council members, Planning Commission members, and meeting attendees. Several Council and community members stated they did not think Council members needed any more responsibilities added to their many other duties. Findley believes that they can handle the small amount of paperwork coming in. It was pointed out that the Commission is also working on a Comprehensive Use plan and that the City ordinances need to be updated and cleaned up. Findley asked how long they have been waiting for the Comprehensive Use plan to be completed. It was clarified that the Commission is down to the last two sections.

Head of Council Toni Thompson stated she believes the City needs to keep what they've got and that nine is better than five with four people on the Planning Commission plus five on City Council. It was asked if Council can nominate two members to attend Planning Commission meetings. Councilperson Woolf explained that all members or none must attend, per State requirements. A probationary period to allow the Planning Commission to work through the current issues was suggested.

Findley made a motion to disband the Planning

Commission. Motion died. Findley made a motion to give the Planning Commission a 60-day window to meet quorum, show what's being accomplished in their meetings, and fulfill their goals and responsibilities. Findley and Cary Clarke will meet to define and write down exactly what those goals and responsibilities are, with the 60-day window to start after that. The motion passed unanimously.

Findley reiterated her reasons for believing Young should not be accepted onto the planning Commission at this time and made a motion to the same. Motion died. Discussion included comments that "we need everyone we can get" and that Young is a man of character and has done a lot for the community. Head of Council Thompson made a motion that Young be added to the Planning Commission. Motion passed 3-2, with Findley and Armbruster voting against.

The Council moved on to addressing a public hearing on the IFA loan for DEQ-required upgrades to the sewer system was set for April 1 at 6 p.m. at the schoolhouse. The meeting will include information as to how the loan affects the City's indebtedness limit.

Findley stated she would like to get the Park Project finished and remaining grant paperwork in by 3/31. She volunteered to complete the remaining painting as Young will be out of town. The remaining unassembled play equipment was discussed and Young said he will re-tape it with caution tape.

Anna Stafford reported on the Oregon Festivals and Events Association conference she and Lori-Jean Pruitt attended last week in Seaside. She reported hearing success stories from tiny towns hosting events and coming away with the two things needed for a successful event are time and more time. Whoever coordinators the Flea Market will have to spend a lot of time coordinating, getting community buy-in, etc. They also learned about new technology, including a smart phone app for instant feedback called Good Snitch, and about getting sponsors for events.

Findley shared a concern regarding trespassing in the City watershed and unpermitted sanitation issues. Utility Manager McKinney is looking into this and coordinating with USFS. The information is unsubstantiated at this point.

Findley also promised copies of the Fire Department business plan with recommendations and feedback to be given to at the next meeting.

Councilperson Annie Oakley mentioned a concern from Diane Miller about metal junk piling up. McKinney explained the metal recycler couldn't get out due to snow. It was asked if something can be done about old tires also.

Sumpter City Council will now meet second and fourth Tuesdays, with the next meeting scheduled for March 24 at 7 p.m.

Awaken, arise, advance was women's retreat theme



Gina K. Swartz / The Baker County Press

Kim Meeder of Bend was the keynote speaker at last weekend's retreat.

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Sponsored by Baker City Women's Connection, Baker City MOPS and local area churches, the community-wide women's retreat hosted at the Baker City First Church of the Nazarene by the rural Christian Women Team was once again a success. On March 7, women came together in faith to support the event.

The guest keynote speaker for the event was Kim Meeder of Bend, OR. Meeder has written four books: "Hope Rising," "Bridge Called Hope," "Blind Hope," and "Fierce Beauty" and is the co-founder, with her husband Troy, of Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch.

Meeder shared how her life was ripped apart and her faith sealed at the tender age of nine by her parents murder-suicide. Meeder gave a heart-wrenching account of that painful time including the fact that she did not even attend her parents' funerals. Meeder experienced the special emotional comfort and love a little mare was able to provide on that day, giving her a healing refuge that became the foundation for much that would follow in her life. Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch began in 1993 with a nine-acre piece of property outside of Bend. The land that was an abandoned cinder mine had been virtually ruined. The Meeders successfully worked the land in an effort to rehabilitate to the point it would once again sustain life.

In 1995, Meeder rescued the first two horses, one starved almost to the point of death the other badly beaten. Soon children began finding their way to this miraculous ranch with selfless efforts to help these horses recover. Healing began taking place in not only the horses but in the hearts of those caring for the horses. Meeder saw lives being transformed by love, just as had happened to her. When Meeder witnessed a mute girl speak freely to one of the rescued mares, that sealed her desire to build the ranch into a place where horses and children could help one another heal.

The ranch provides a place where children, families and horses that are "broken" can begin healing, find wholeness, trust and a sense of belonging through the embrace of God's unconditional love.

Doors to the retreat event opened at 8:00 a.m. with refreshments, followed by praise and worship music by Kelly Nichols, JoAnne Fletcher, Jessica Foster, Elle Scott and Tovah Potter. The group was welcomed by Elissa Morrison who then welcomed Meeder. Following Meeder's address in which she recounted her life-changing experience and the ranch that eventually formed, breakout sessions were conducted. Attendees were offered five breakout sessions from which to choose.

Topics of the sessions included: Keys to Successful Step-Parenting hosted by Christine Hawes, Conquering Life's Challenges hosted by Lynne Applegate, With the Lord, Life is a Special Occasion hosted by Anita Swartz and Sustaining and Keeping Focus on God In The Worst Of Life's Circumstances hosted by Kadie Cosby and Jocelynn Potter. After the breakout sessions concluded everyone reassembled.

Arletta Anderson, Donna Kilgore, Jerri Wickert and Elissa Morrison provided some comic relief hosting a "The View" type show in an impromptu skit highlighting how sometimes emotions and perceptions can get in the way and affect relationships. The group emphasized the importance of coming together in unity and faith so we may overcome the petty differences that are affecting our relationships and show His love for one another. Meeder returned to address the group a second time speaking toward the theme of the event "awaken, arise and advance."

She told of a friend that lost her son to suicide and reflected on the impact that it had not only in her friend's life but hers as well, seeing the big picture of how vulnerable we are and we need to become stronger to protect our families. She also related a story about the rescue of a dog that just did not seem to be improving until it was discovered that an arrow was lodged inside the dog. Once the arrow was removed the dog began to immediately improve. Meeder used the arrow story as an analogy to show that once whatever may be inside poisoning and preventing healing is removed, we are open.

Meeder's Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch has a website that gives information about the ranch and its mission and a Facebook page. The Rural Christian Women's Team also has a Facebook page.