

Local

Citizen concerns heard at second interchange plan meeting

By Gina K. Swartz

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Matt Hughart and Nick Foster from Kittleson and Associates, consultants hired by ODOT, facilitated a second public meeting Tuesday regarding the Interchange Area Management Plan (IAMP). The meeting was conducted in the fellowship hall of the Nazarene church located at 1250 Hughes Lane.

The first meeting was held January 29 at City Hall in the City Council Chambers. Hughart and Foster took from that first meeting input from those present and adjusted plans that had been previously drawn up in an effort to accommodate citizen concerns.

This meeting saw many more property owners than the previous and several were familiar with the original planning efforts from approximately 10 years earlier.

The meeting began very informally as attendees milled around poster boards outlining some of the plan ideas.

Hughart and Foster were available to answer questions, explain plans and take input.

Michelle Owen, City Public Works Director, Holly Kerns, Baker County Planning Director and Patrick Knight from ODOT were also on hand to field questions.

County Commissioner Bill Harvey was in attendance as well. Hughart formally addressed the crowd advising that their part in the plan was to assist ODOT in readdressing the old plan and make changes as necessary.

“The purpose of an IAMP is a long-term plan, 20 plus years out, that focuses primarily on interchanges, Freeway or State Highway interchanges,” Hughart explained. “The state of Oregon realized in the late 90s that they needed to have a more formalized process for preserving and ensuring the interchanges they’d built and were going to build in the future, they wanted to make sure they were preserved from capacity and safety standpoints.”



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Left to Right: Nick Foster, Nazareth Church Pastor Johnathon Privett, and Holly Kerns.

There is concern that unforeseen growth would inundate interchanges with traffic and unsafe conditions that weren’t originally planned for when built and constructed.

ODOT would like to see all interchanges, even the most rural, have a blueprint for operation in the future. That is as Hughart explained, “What we are trying to accomplish here, we are trying to preserve and generate a plan for how ODOT, Baker County and the City of Baker City can all work together and make sure interchanges will operate in a manner that meets standards by identifying projects to address changes that might occur either in the near future, 5-10 years or long term 20 plus years out.”

Hughart acknowledged that the possibility exists that should things develop differently than what is projected, any adopted plan would of course need to be revised and should a plan be adopted it is not so set in stone that it can’t be modified as necessary.

Several property owners, obviously unhappy with proposed plans expressed concerns.

One concern raised dealt with measurements of right of ways. Don Beck said, “I have a well that is 12 feet from the road. My house is

only 20 feet away.”

Should expansion or replacement of the existing road be done Beck is concerned about the impacts that may affect his well and home.

Another question posed was selling of property, once this plan was put into place and what future affects that may cause. It was noted that once completed and adopted the plan is public record and can be accessed by anyone interested in purchasing property in the future.

Another question raised was although a specific area of property may be included in the plan, can property owners continue to do with that land as they please. For example build a barn on it.

Holly Kerns answered, “Until an easement for land has been purchased, no it can’t be prevented. From a land use perspective we would prefer to work with that land owner in an effort to avoid a future issue.”

There was agreement from those attending that this was all unnecessary. The recent project being done at Biggs Junction was brought up and the question asked why expansion simply could not be dealt with when it was needed, like was being done there.

“It is more costly to fix

a problem than to prevent it. We want to be proactive not reactive,” Hughart replied.

Another concern voiced was that once this plan was adopted the State or County could just make the changes as they wanted or when funds may be offered to them.

Hughart assured land owners that specific language could be written into the plan to assure that would not happen. “The use of ‘if and or when’ can make the conditions for change very specific,” he said, indicating changes could not be made on a whim or simply because funds may be made available but only when certain requirements are being met.

For anyone who was unable to attend the meeting but wishes to review plans or make comments there is a link on the City’s website bakercity.com.

The project team is moving in the direction of adoption of a plan by July and more meetings and work sessions are being planned.

All future meetings and work sessions will be posted on the City of Baker City’s website and public input will continue to be sought.

Poet laureate to visit library

On Saturday, May 16, 2015 Oregon’s Poet Laureate Peter Sears will be doing a special reading at Baker County Public Library. The event takes place from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. in the Riverside Meeting Room.

Peter Sears is an award winning and nationally recognized poet. He is a graduate of Yale University and the Iowa Writers workshop. He was appointed Oregon’s seventh Poet Laureate in April 2014. Some of the previous Laureates include Edwin Markham, Ben Hur Lampman, and Ethel Romig Fuller. He has written four full length poetry books titled Small Talk, The Brink, Green River, and Luge. Sears’ poems have been featured in major publications like The New York Times, Rolling Stone, and Poetry Northwest. He currently teaches in the Pacific University low-residency MFA department. Sears’ poetry collection, “The Brink,” was named one of Oregon’s 150 best books by the Oregon State Library.

During his two-year term as Poet Laureate, Sears is committed to fostering the art of poetry and encouraging literacy and learning across the state of Oregon. He’s looking to use his position to attract new readers and highlight the creative work of writers from diverse communities across the state.

For more information visit the Oregon Poet Laureate site at oregonpoetlaureate.org or the library’s webpage www.bakerlib.org.

Spring concert to be April 17

The Baker Community Orchestra will hold its Spring Concert Friday, April 17 at 7:00 p.m. at the Veteran’s Advocates of Oregon and Idaho Events Center at Court and Main Streets in Baker City. There is no admission and all are welcome.

The orchestra, under the direction of Kelly Brickman, will perform a mix of classical, show music, as well as original compositions. Composers include Leonard Bernstein, Ludwig von Beethoven, Rimsky-Korsakov and W. A. Mozart. Hymn from Beethoven’s 6th Symphony, The Russian Sailors’ Dance from The Red Poppy, and an original composition, Fantasy on a Slavic Theme, are among the pieces the Orchestra has prepared.

The Baker Community Orchestra is made up of volunteer community members who have a passion for making music. The orchestra is open to any community member who can play a band or orchestra instrument. There is no audition requirement, just come and play!

OTEC ballots mailed out

Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative announces that ballots for its proposed bylaw revisions and Board of Directors elections were mailed on Friday, April 3rd. There are three positions on the OTEC Board up for election, as well as, 15 proposed changes to OTEC’s governing bylaws.

Board of Director candidates on the ballot this year include:

- Incumbent Austin Bingaman for Union County position #4.
- Incumbent Aletha Bonebrake and candidate Wayne Overton for Baker County position #5.
- Incumbent Gary Miller for Grant County position #6.

All candidates are running to serve a 3-year term. The election results will be announced during OTEC’s Annual Membership meeting set for Saturday, May 2nd at the Grant County Fairgrounds in John Day.

Included with the ballots are a voter’s guide, biographies of each of the candidates, and a summary of the proposed bylaw revisions. Complete details of the proposed bylaw changes are available on OTEC’s website (www.otecc.com). Voting members will be able to cast their ballots by mail or deliver them in person at the annual meeting. Members who elect to vote by mail can also enter a contest to win a flat screen TV.

Registration for the 2015 Annual Membership meeting will begin at 10 a.m. on Saturday, May 2nd followed by a business meeting at 11 a.m. A complimentary lunch catered by the Snaffle Bit will be served at 12:30 p.m. Entertainment will be provided by Frank Carlson and door prize drawings will be held throughout the annual meeting.

Hospital book fair this month

Saint Alphonsus Auxiliary-Baker City will be holding their annual book fair Thursday, April 23rd from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.. The book fair will be located in the hospital breezeway. There will be a wide selection of books as well as other gifts at 40% to 70% off retail pricing. Come and bring a friend.

Proceeds will go to benefit Saint Alphonsus Medical Center – Baker City and our Auxiliary Scholarship Fund for students seeking a career in the medical field. Credit Cards accepted.

Mabry Anders bill passes House

The House of Representatives unanimously passed House Bill 2981, legislation that directs the Department of Transportation to erect and maintain a Fallen Hero roadside memorial sign for Army Specialist Mabry James Anders, who was killed in action while serving in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom.

During his remarks, HB 2981 chief sponsor Representative Cliff Bentz (R-Ontario), read excerpts from a letter written by Specialist Anders’ parents, who shared their son’s love for the outdoors and his fellow servicemen:

“Mabry was a fun-loving young man. He lived his life to the fullest. He loved the outdoors, riding dirt bikes, off-roading in his Jeep, horseback riding, and flying helicopters
“His humor, strong sense

of friendship, encouragement and compassion touched many lives. Mabry was dedicated to his family, his friends and his brothers-in-arms. He loved serving his country and those he served with.

“A friend quoted Mabry as saying, ‘If you want to learn something in this life, learn how to live.’”

“Let us today promise that we in this Oregon House deeply appreciate the value and life you have given to the protection of our state and our nation. And we realize, as we vote, that the actions we take in this wonderful room—so peaceful and so quiet, so safe—are in great part possible because of the sacrifice made by your family and your son,” said Rep. Bentz as he addressed Specialist Anders’ parents and grandparents.

Immediately following



Submitted Photo.

Specialist Mabry James Anders.

Rep. Bentz’s remarks, the House passed the bill to erect a Fallen Hero roadside memorial sign for Specialist Anders near milepost 36 on

Oregon Route 7. Specialist Anders and his family also received a standing ovation from the House for Mabry’s service and sacrifice