

Local

County hears Justice Court update, approves new NRAC bylaws



Todd Arriola / The Baker County Press

L-R: Doni Bruland of the County’s NRAC with Commissioners Mark Bennett, Bill Harvey and Bruce Nichols.

BY TODD ARRIOLA
Todd@TheBakerCountyPress.com

The Baker County Board of Commissioners held its first regular session of the month, on Wednesday, April 5, 2017, 9 a.m., in the Commission Chambers of the Baker County Courthouse, which included, among other topics, a Justice Court update from Trial Court Administrator Michael Finney, and a Natural Resources Advisory Committee (NRAC) Bylaws approval.

Present from the Board were Chair Bill Harvey, Commissioners Mark Bennett and Bruce Nichols, and Executive Assistant Heidi Martin.

Attendance also included Baker County Sheriff Travis Ash, Baker County Road Master Jeff Smith, Baker County NRAC Chair Doni Bruland, Ed Hardt, Ken Anderson, Marshall Mccomb, Tork and Wanda Ballard, and Tom Van Diepen.

The meeting was called to order, and the Invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance were recited, both led by Harvey.

The agenda was adopted, with some noted additions, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols.

There was no noted comment provided for Citizen Participation.

The minutes from the Wednesday, March 15, 2017 regular session were approved, with no noted corrections, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols.

Finney provided a Justice Court update, which included, among other topics, details regarding revenue, which Finney said has decreased significantly, partly because of the harsh winter, a majority of revenue comes from traffic citations, and there is a lack in pursuing frequent offenders, who’ve committed misdemeanor offenses.

He said that highway and freeway deaths have, not surprisingly, increased, since speed limits were increased.

He said that he noticed an arbitrary, license suspension fee, and it was reduced to \$15, which he said will have an impact with revenue, and that other courts have shown a wide range in the same type of fee charged, which

he said doesn’t make sense.

Finney said that the Justice Court has remained stable, regarding the number of staff, and that the video conference system is finally working, and expected to be fully functional probably in June.

A Baker County Parks property discussion was held, regarding an two pieces of property, one approximately 120 acres, Reference No. 12169, and the other approximately 42 acres, Reference No. 12061, with land valued at \$68,440, and \$41,170, respectively.

As Parks Director Karen Spencer could not attend the session, and the Board required more information and input from the Parks Department, the discussion was tabled for now.

An Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) between the City of Huntington and Baker County, for law enforcement services provided by Baker County within Huntington City limits and the surrounding areas, was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols.

According to the agreement, the term is July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018 (the fiscal year), and Huntington will pay the County \$54,000 in December 2017, for these services.

Ash spoke with the Board regarding the details, prior to the agreement’s approval.

Nichols also mentioned his involvement with audit services for Huntington, however, he stated there is no conflict.

IGA No. 31521, a Continuous Operations Variance Permit Authorization, between the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and Baker County, was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols.

According to the agreement, ODOT will issue oversize/overweight continuous operations variance permits (OS/OW COVP) authorizing use of roads under County jurisdiction, for travel by oversize/overweight vehicles and loads, in order to streamline the process for issuing permits. Smith spoke to the Board regarding the details, prior to the agreement’s approval.

The Board discussed a Road Department future purchase request, for a backhoe trailer, with Smith.

He said the trailer, which would be 30 feet total in length and pulled with a dump truck, would resolve safety issues, regarding the tail gate on the current one.

Funding of up to \$21,000 was authorized, with three bids, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols.

Order No. 2017-118, Designating A Sole Source Provider For Mason Dam Consultation In Completing Draft Final Biological Assessment And The Final License Application, was tabled, with a motion from Harvey, and a second from Bennett.

Bennett had expressed some concern there is no cap stated, regarding total compensation, and Harvey said more information would be needed from Baker County Emergency Management Director Jason Yencopal.

Nichols opted out of the discussion, as he stated a conflict.

Order No. 2017-119, Designating A Local Public Health Administrator, was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols.

According to the order, Nancy Staten, who is currently providing Baker County Public Health Department oversight, was designated.

The Baker County Natural Resources Advisory Committee (NRAC) Bylaws were approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols. Bruland, who drafted the bylaws using another committee’s bylaws as a guide, discussed the details of the document with the Board, prior to its approval.

The Board discussed an advisory letter with Bruland, addressed from the NRAC to the Board, recommending a stronger County stance, in the maintenance of the Baker City Watershed.

Bruland said that the comments provided in the letter are based on the 1990 Land and Resource Management Plan for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

Amendment No. 12 To Oregon Health Authority 2015-2017 IGA For The Financing Of Community

Addictions And Mental Health Services Agreement No. 147781 was ratified, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols.

Discussion included Bennett’s request that staff reports or executive summaries be provided from departments, for documents submitted to the Board.

After some further discussion regarding Nichols’ experience with deciphering OHA forms and documents, Nichols was authorized as a signatory on OHA Behavioral Health forms of approval, with a motion from Harvey, and a second from Bennett.

Harvey discussed with the Board a letter Harvey addressed to Wallowa-Whitman Forest Service Supervisor Tom Montoya, and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Vale District Manager Don Gonzalez, as well as others, requesting both agencies to streamline the process of approving mining Plans of Operations, and that management of all minerals be transferred to the BLM.

The Board discussed a recent Tri-County Weed Management Area (TC-WMA) Executive Board meeting Harvey had attended, in reference to the County’s continuing attempts to resolve issues it sees with the TCWMA structure and management, including the County’s need for a TCWMA staff person to be located in Baker City, and for TCWMA to improve its project bidding process, which would include advertising in applicable counties’ local papers.

The Board discussed a recent Eastern Oregon Counties Association (EOCA) meeting the Board had attended via telephone, which highlighted issues regarding severe decreases in Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) and with the halting in Secure Rural Schools (SRS) funding.

The Board discussed its concerns with membership in EOCA, including whether membership produces acceptable results, and \$15,000 was approved to be paid to EOCA, to cover current amounts due, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Bennett.

Guardrail to be replaced along Hwy. 86

Contractors working for the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) will be upgrading several sections of guardrail along the Baker – Copperfield Highway (Oregon Highway 86) this summer.

The estimated \$470,000 project will replace aging guardrail located between Flagstaff Hill at mile post 4.95 and mile point 31.33, about nine miles west of Richland.

During guardrail replacement work travelers can expect lane restrictions, flaggers and/or pilot cars with up to 20-minute delays at times. Motorists are reminded to watch for road work signs and be mindful of crews and equipment throughout the highway construction season. Additional media notices will be issues prior to construction activities.

The contract for the work will be bid in late May, with construction expected to begin this summer.

All work is scheduled to be completed by the end of the year.

“Some older guardrail sections have not been updated since the 1950’s and no longer meet current standards,” said ODOT Project Leader Sean Maloney. “The changes will create a safer, more efficient roadway for this important highway in Baker County.”

This project is the third phase of guardrail replacement along the route located in east Baker County. A fourth and final phase of guardrail upgrades to complete the work on this 70-mile-long route will be scheduled in the future, as funding becomes available.

Pipe spill shuts down freeway



Photo courtesy of the BCFD.

A lost load of pipes closed down the freeway for several hours last week.

At 6:06 p.m., Friday, March 31, Baker City Fire Department (BCFD) units responded to an accident on I-84 at MP 332.

Pictured below is an 18 wheeler that rolled on to it’s left side spilling it’s load into the opposing lanes and disabling another 18 wheeler heading in the opposite direction.

The truck was carrying sewer pipes and spilled diesel fuel when it flipped over.

Highway traffic was so snarled that BCFD units had to back track around the incident via Plano and Sisily Creek roads.

BCFD units naviagted the dirt roads for 15 minutes until they eventually could get back to the highway below the accident. Luckily once on scene, only minor injuries were found.

The scene was released to OSP and Huntington Rural Fire District.

Eclipse book author comes to library

Baker County Public Library is pleased to host children’s book author/illustrator Nancy Coffelt on April 26, 2017 at 10 a.m. for a special story time about the upcoming solar eclipse. The August 21st total eclipse is going to be an amazing spectacle and a fantastic opportunity to engage kids in observational science.

At this free event for children, Nancy will showcase her book, “The Big Eclipse” being used by schools and libraries all over Oregon. We’ll talk about how eclipses work, discuss why it’s important to “Be Wise, Protect Your Eyes”, and do a fun craft around this rare astronomical event.

Nancy Coffelt is the author and illustrator of many books, including two previous picture books about space science. She lives, writes, and draws in Baker City, Oregon.

This program is made possible by Baker County Library District with sponsorship from Libraries of Eastern Oregon (LEO) and ArtPlaceAmerica.