

CITY MANAGER: Sees more conflict than necessary in Sisters

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the day, City Council has to make the decision. What we have here is a representative democracy. We elect people to make the decisions.”

Allen talked about the challenge of running city government with lay people as councilors dealing with “complex, controversial, and complicated issues.”

When councilors are first elected, or there is a continual turnover like that in Sisters in the last few years, Allen said newly elected officials think they should just listen until they are up to speed on the issues.

“They get pushed in all directions and issues tend to drag on longer than necessary. That can create controversy where there wasn’t any,” Allen said.

Allen’s *modus operandi* is to identify the issue, deal with it, and move on. He stressed the importance of not taking or making anything personal.

“That (the personal) has to be set aside,” he said.

He believes one important ingredient that has been missing in Sisters is appropriate education for elected and appointed individuals as to what their roles are and how they should be interacting with each other — council with staff, council with appointed commissions and committees, and council and staff with the citizens.

Allen mentioned that the League of Oregon Cities (LOC) offers training about the roles of city council and staff.

He would like to see regular citizens also come to the workshops to gain a better understanding of their city government and hopefully prepare to run for office.

“If we don’t do this (the training), we will just have a repeat of the last two cycles,” Allen warned.

“The Council’s job is to decide broad policy and then let the staff implement the policy,” he said.

Allen also noted that Sisters and Bend are the only two Central Oregon municipalities that appoint their mayors. He suggested that perhaps Sisters could explore having the mayor run for office, with the citizens voting for their choice.

At first glance, Allen thinks there has been more conflict in Sisters than there needs to be. At the core of most city conflict he sees a “fear of loss” — of a way of life, of the way things have always been, or any number of other things people are afraid they will lose, rather than focusing on what they will gain. He also sees competing values accompanying that fear of loss, such as growth vs. no growth, and land preservation vs. development. Expansion of the small Sisters Airport, with increased air traffic and activity — is a perfect example of potential conflict rooted in those concerns.

“You have what many towns want. You have all the pieces and the people. With that comes various values — some people wanting more work opportunities and others who are retired. That can give rise to conflict,” Allen pointed out.

Allen hit the ground running several weeks ago. Although his contract is for a part-time position, he is in and out of City Hall, and all around town, at any hour of the day or night. Although he resides in Madras and still spends some time in La Pine, Allen’s cabin at Camp Sherman facilitates

his burning the midnight oil in Sisters and then staying at his Metolius refuge. He says being single makes it possible to work odd hours.

Currently, Allen sees his main responsibilities lying in three areas. First of all, he is reviewing the actual day-to-day running of City Hall, getting to know the staff and assuring them in their duties, studying how City Council and staff interact with each other and both of them with the citizens.

Secondly, his days (and nights) are filled with meeting people and discussing the current major issues facing the City and the citizens. He is looking at the land-use appeals surrounding McKenzie Meadow Village, the Economic Development Loan Program, the use and growth of the airport, and dealing with issues that arose prior to his hiring. He is exploring best practices in other towns and seeing if there are any Sisters could adopt so as to not reinvent the wheel if someone else has it figured out.

He has already secured new legal counsel for the City, and down the road will begin to explore options for a permanent city manager to be hired by City Council. Allen will also be working with the Oregon Department of Transportation, Public Works Director Paul Bertagna, and several citizen committees on timing, logistics for traffic, and design of the approved roundabout at Highway 20/McKinney Butte.

“I am able to look at

things with fresh eyes,” Allen said.

Allen was an early transplant to Central Oregon. He was a sixth grader in Park Rose when his dad came to operate the bowling alley in Madras. Since that time, Allen has called Madras home. For 40 years, he has served as a volunteer firefighter/EMT, an avocation he loves.

“If I had my life to live over, I would do that (fire service). It has taught me a lot about what’s really important. It’s my hobby. I love the fire service and I have a great group of friends,” Allen said.

He has already met with his friend Sisters Fire Chief Roger Johnson and his crew. He also recounted floating a river with Tay Robertson, Sisters’ former fire chief.

Allen confessed that when he was contacted to ask if he would be interested in the interim city manager position, “I thought to myself, I’m busy in my own business (in Madras), I’m not quite done in La Pine (training their new



PHOTO BY SUE STAFFORD

Rick Allen.

city manager), and this is one of those opportunities to not pass up.”

Allen sees Sisters as a great place to live, work, build a business, and raise a family.

“I can’t make Sisters a better place, because it is already great,” Allen remarked. But he is hopeful he can take what is already here and help make it run smoother, with less conflict while getting more accomplished.

To contact Allen, email rallen@ci.sisters.or.us.

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