

# Local

## City holds goal-setting meeting



Gina K. Swartz / The Baker County Press

Fire Chief Mark John, at left, talks to City Council members during an initial goal setting session.

By Gina K. Swartz

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Saturday, March 21, 2015 City Council met from 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. in a special work session to identify goals they would like to work toward.

All City Councilors were in attendance with the exception of Councilor Downing.

Mike Kee, City Manager facilitated the session. Kee opened with, "I found minutes from a goal setting session in 2003 just to kind of get the juices flowing.

As Kee read the minutes he noted a couple of the goals in that session such as the Resort Street improvement that had been completed in an effort to spark the Council.

Kee also thanked Council: "In the last couple of months it seems, maybe we don't always agree. There are different ideas and Councilors state them. We take note and then that's the end of it. Staff has expressed how easily they've been able to work with Council and I just want to thank you for that it's been a completely different environment."

City Departments were invited to present specific department goals to the council for consideration. The Council was addressed by Police Chief Wyn Lohner, Fire Chief Mark John, City Finance Manager Jeanie Dexter, City Public Works Director Michelle Owen and City Human Resources Manager/City Recorder Luke Yeaton. Each gave a short presentation to the Council as to what goals each department has.

Some department goals were in line with goals the council envisioned while others were very department specific and a few even lent themselves to the future and others were items that would be addressed during the budget process.

Both Police Chief Wyn Lohner and Fire Chief Mark John addressed the council.

As public safety entities, they have similar goals working toward public safety, service and livability in our community. Both addressed staffing concerns and the need to replace equipment.

The Police Department is in need of replacing ballistic vests while the Fire Department has a couple different items that John would like to see replaced but understands the cost to do it all at once would be significant.

The department currently has 49 self-contained breathing apparatus bottles that are about halfway through their service life. Nine of the bottles are aftermarket bottles and are of no use to the Department. John was unsure of how those bottles were acquired but they are not OSHA approved and could be a huge liability to the City if not removed from inventory.

John suggested a schedule to replace all of the bottles a few at a time so as to soften the budgetary impact of replacing that necessary equipment.

He also brought attention to suits that also are nearing the end of service life and suggested the same method of replacement for those. "Two things I stressed to the fire department staff when I arrived as things of utmost importance to me: safety and service. I don't believe those will change over time. They will remain very consistent."

With calls increasing and projected to reach 1,800-1,900 calls per year both staffing resources and equipment are affected. Under Oregon Standards our Fire Department is required to have on duty at all times a paramedic and at minimum a Basic EMT. John says they try to maintain four on-staff but occasionally only three are available.

Lieutenant Taggart received a variance from the state that allows use of a first responder as a driver. John spoke of grant options that could help provide funding to increase staff and help with equipment replacement.

Kee indicated a conversation with County officials was needed to make them aware that EMS services are provided to the County as well.

"There are approximately 17,000 people that receive service and about 9,000 people are essentially paying for it. We need to ask what they can do to help us fund this. I'm sure it's important to them that this service is available," John said, making it clear that calls within the county were not a daily occurrence but estimated the number of calls to be around 150 per year.

Cost recovery on ambulance services was also a big issue for the department many insurances have changed, some have incredibly high deductibles and there are specific limits Medicare and Medicaid will pay for ambulance



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Baker City Police Chief Wyn Lohner address Councilors. Issues discussed included public safety, transportation, utilities, and recreation.

services.

Jeanie Dexter told the Council that collection rates for ambulance services were about 45% and although uncollected ambulance service bills are turned over to an outside collection agency, their collection rate is only about thirty percent.

Police Chief Wyn Lohner also tackled the School Resource Officer need.

He said, "We are working on locating the grant match funding opportunities necessary so we can move forward. I know the Mayor has met with the school board chair, as have I, and it seems that we have a pretty solid commitment from them. We have reached out to the DA who in turn is talking with the County Commission to try to come up with some funds there since we have a large number of students that come in from the county."

Lohner also addressed the fact that traffic safety is a big issue for his department.

He envisions increasing use of the motorcycles the department now has. Other department specific goals included continuing improvements to the Leo Adler Memorial Parkway and water and waste water management plans.

Michelle Owen, Public Works Director indicated that there were continuing upgrades and changes that need to be addressed with the water management plans but DEQ had not been able to provide clear direction for the City.

Council agreed that one of the goals they needed to work toward was working and providing clear and open communication with government agencies and partners, perhaps more open communication could provide the City with tools to achieve the goals they foresee.

The final goals the council came up with were

- Promote Government Integrity
- Maintain and Enhance Water Security

- Increase Citizen Involvement
- Budget Management (require cost effective use of funds)
- Continue Support of Parks and Outdoor Spaces
- Evaluate and Enhance Economic Development Plan
- Continue to promote communication and collaboration with community partners and government entities
- Implement an asset maintenance schedule
- Develop a waste water disposal plan
- Enhance Community Livability

Within the goal of increasing citizen participation upgrading the audio and video equipment was identified as a target priority.

Mayor Mosier felt that some citizens may not be comfortable attending a public meeting therefore the need to improve the quality of recorded meetings was vital for those that wished to keep up on City issues and stay involved.

Mosier also would like to see a greater use of the citizen participation at the beginning of City Council meetings and suggested inviting various community clubs and organizations to speak and update the Council on what they are doing or planning within our community.

Councilor Merrill also said he would really like to see a city employee recognition program implemented to pay tribute to employees that go above and beyond.

City Manager Mike Kee plans to compile the list into an email that will be sent to each Council member. In turn the Councilors will rate each goal by number as to the value of importance according to them and send back the email.

Once all the emails have been sent back, based on Council votes Kee will reassemble the list in order by votes as to the most important then send it out to Council again.

## Keating girl places first in essay contest



Submitted Photo.

Fifth graders, from left to right: Lyla Bates, Phoebe Wise, Lacy Churchfield, Donovan Weideman, Weston Slatter.

By Todd Arriola

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On Tuesday, Lacy Churchfield, an 11-year-old 5th grader at Keating Elementary School, was presented with a 1st place medal and \$50 from Joan Smith and Cherlyne Allen of the Lone Pine Tree Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), for her essay, titled "A Child's Journey Through Ellis Island."

In recognition of the 125th anniversary of Ellis Island as an immigration station, DAR chapters across the country, including the Lone Pine Tree Chapter, celebrated by challenging students to write an essay about what the experience there might have been like for children their own age. The National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution shares the same anniversary, 125 years in service to the nation.

Kathi Shaw, head teacher at Keating for the last 14 years, said this year, the five 5th graders at Keating participated in the essay contest. Those were Churchfield, Phoebe Wise, who placed 2nd, and Lyla Bates, Weston Slatter, and Donovan Weideman, who all place 3rd.

"This is the best job they've ever done," said Shaw, explaining that students have participated in the contest 10 times in the past, with a different essay topic each year. The contest has been open to 5th and 6th grade students, but Shaw said, as there were no 6th graders at Keating this year, only the five students competed.

Eva Hiatt, former member of DAR who passed away earlier this year, was "really instrumental in encouraging the kids to participate, and she would have been proud of them." Shaw said Hiatt and her husband were frequent attendees at school functions, like plays, etc., and she was "almost like a grandmother" to the students.

The essays were to be between 300 and 600 words, written from the viewpoint of children the students' ages, about experiences at Ellis Island with family members. The students could use different sources, which were required to be cited, and the experiences needed to be fact-based.

Shaw said they were informed of the essay subject matter last fall, and they were all submitted by January 1st.

Churchfield said, "I worked about two months on my essay. I researched a little bit online, and with some books. That was really fun. Writing's really fun." Most of it was completed on her own, and her essay was 549 words long, she said.

Churchfield earned the honor of attending the state contest ceremony in Salem in May, and she'll get to read her essay aloud while there, she said. She lives on a ranch in Keating with her parents, Jarret and Stephanie, and will "probably put the \$50 toward rodeo stuff. We rodeo when we can," she said.

## Langrell v. City

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Judge Pahl's ruling was issued Friday, March 13 and was addressed in executive session at the March 27 City Council meeting.

According to Langrell, terms of the settlement include repayment of what he was overcharged and payment of all attorney's fees and Court costs.

"About \$55,000 is the cost to the citizens of Baker," said Langrell, "all because the City Manager couldn't read a simple one-page contract. For the last ten years I've gone to every City Manager. But because it was near the end of the ten year moratorium, it was time to do something."

After approaching current City Manager Mike Kee more than once and getting nowhere, Langrell said, he acquired an attorney to help resolve the matter.

Langrell, who was the Mayor of Baker City when the lawsuit was filed, also said, "During depositions City Manager Mike Kee admitted the City had absolutely no legal document that allows them to charge double for sewer and water."

The City attorney at the time the moratorium was enacted and the contract written was Tim Collins. According to Langrell, Collins has been gone from the City for at least ten years and stated, "We are still cleaning up his mistakes." Collins also served as interim City Manager as did Steve Bogart and Steve Brocato was hired to serve as City Manager during that time frame as well.