

Local

City Council: herbicide use proves hot topic

• COUNCIL HONORS BARBARA JOHNSON, ACCEPTS TREE CITY USA HONOR

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The City Council meeting on Tuesday began on a somber note. Mayor Mosier began the meeting with the usual pledge of allegiance followed by a moment of silence to honor former City Councilwoman Barbara Johnson who passed away April 25, 2015.

She said, “Tonight for invocation I ask that we take a minute to remember Barbara Johnson. Barbara ended her term in January and she passed away last weekend. She spent two of her last years of her life in service to this community as a City Councilor.

“Barbara told me several times that she ran for Council on the platform of civility. That if nothing else she promised to work together with her fellow councilors to be respectful and civil. I think that is a fine goal and something to be reminded of tonight.”

After that moment of silence honoring Johnson for her service, Luke Yeaton conducted roll call. With all councilors present Mayor Mosier moved forward with the meeting. The meeting minutes from the last City Council meeting were approved unanimously and Mayor Mosier called for citizen participation for which there was none.

Poppy Day.

The next item on the agenda was the Poppy Day Proclamation. Representatives of American Legion Auxiliary #41 and V.F.W. Auxiliary #3048 stood proud in front of council with Natasha Clark, American Legion poppy girl and Riley and Taylor (identified only by first name), V.F.W. poppy girls as Mayor Mosier read aloud a proclamation declaring May 1–May 31 “Poppy Day” honoring those that have served our country.

The red poppy has been designated as a symbol of sacrifice of lives in all wars.

After the proclamation was read, councilors were given the opportunity to purchase poppies as were any citizens attending the meeting.

Trees, trees, and more trees.

Dan Story, chairman of the tree board addressed Council. Story advised Council as to some of the activities the board has been involved in such as revamping the street tree guide including information about local nurseries. The board has been able to partner with the Parks Department to prune eight young trees in community parks.

They have worked with property owners to demonstrate proper health and tree pruning procedures and assisted with aging or diseased trees that needed to be removed.

The board planted 25 street trees and installed irrigation systems to water those trees at the fairgrounds and pruned six trees at Banner Bank as well as trees along Resort

Street.

Story told the council the tree board had the opportunity to meet with Campbell Street business owners to open a discussion about enhancing the most widely used entrances along that area.

“Board members will also participate in an upcoming meeting with 10th Street businesses to discuss possible future opportunities to enhance the appearance of 10th Street with street trees,” Story said. “All thanks to the Silver Street Tree Fund.”

The board plans to replace five street trees along the areas of Basche Sage Place and the Baker Food Co-Op for this year’s Arbor Day project.

Story also indicated that the board is looking into creating a grant through the Silver’s Tree Trust Fund for property owners “Who will be able to receive a street tree through the program.”

Story noted that the tree board is a fairly new program and acknowledged the Council for their support saying, “We have been able to do a lot of great things for the city. As a lot of the street trees in Baker City come to the end of their life cycle we are slowly getting them replaced with trees that are less intrusive to curbs and sidewalks and power lines, which overall in the future will reduce the costs for the City.”

Mayor Mosier asked story if he could “give me any information about a voucher program, can citizens get vouchers through the tree board for trees to be planted on their property?”

Story indicated they could but it would be only for a street tree and that there are some vouchers available for that. Currently they are working with OTEC on a program that would help property owners replace trees removed that interfered with power lines.

As Story wrapped up his presentation, Katie Lompa with the Oregon Department of Forestry Urban and Community forestry assistance program out Prineville presented City Council with a 30-year Tree City USA flag on behalf of the National Arbor Day Foundation and the Oregon State Forestry Department.

Also two new street signs were given.

Lompa said, “You’re one of the oldest members of the Tree City USA communities in Oregon. City of Baker City in one of six cities that have had Tree City USA status for 30 years or more.”

Oregon boasts 56 cities that hold the Tree City USA status of the 242 incorporated cities within the State. The country has over 5,500 Tree City USAs.

All others in Oregon are located in western or central Oregon so as Lompa put it, “For the East side folks, you’re it.”

Lompa noted that the status helped “sell” communities and indicated community leaders and City staff make good decisions on behalf of their residents. “There is much scientific evidence of human health and well-being benefits provided by urban forestry.”

To be a tree city it means

at least \$2 is spent per capita on a tree management program, the City has public tree care in City code and proclaims and holds an Arbor Day ceremony.

Grant writing.

Kat Davis spoke to council regarding economic development. Davis is an independent contractor who contracts with the City to write grants and do research.

She explained grant writing and the best way to obtain grants by “Connecting the dots between that ‘thing’ whatever it is that you’re wanting the grant for and a larger understanding of what the community is, where it is now and where it wants to go.”

She stated that a grant writer needs to make a funder feel comfortable about the idea that the money being given is going to go toward something meaningful and contribute to the community in some way.

She noted that a big issue in this community is the state of our economy. “We are,” as she put it, “kind of flatlined in your economic development and facing issues like an aging population and a slowing in the growth of new businesses. Lots of empty store fronts and the beginnings of the look of decay in the community.”

Davis noted that Baker City is less likely to attract big industry to correct that situation and our community should focus on the small businesses, freelancers, entrepreneurs and the artisan aspect to grow our economy.

Ginger Savage and Michelle Owen have both agreed to become involved and work toward this goal.

Davis cited Hailey, Idaho as a wonderful city to model efforts after as they are very similar in almost all demographics and are successfully reestablishing the economic development there.

Davis, at the direction of the Council will research for funds to conduct a study on how our community can attract more business and what types of businesses would be most successful.

Herbicide use.

A highly controversial item on the agenda was the herbicide report. Michelle Owen, City Public Works Director, addressed council stating, “At the last meeting a citizen brought forth a concern about herbicide use in the city.”

Council requested a report of what was used in the City that Owen addressed in a report provided to each Council member.

“The City itself uses herbicide on places like our lagoon, reservoir, water treatment plant, the wastewater treatment plant and storage facility. Those are public, city-owned properties but are not open to the public. That is one category that is a little different but I felt we needed to discuss that.

“We contract with Grass Masters, Inc. to do our parks, park like spaces. And we have a contractor in place for the golf course, Tiedemann LLC. At the airport we contract with Baker Aircraft to do ground maintenance out there, it a 400 acre space that they have done by



Gina K. Swartz / The Baker County Press

Representatives of American Legion Auxiliary #41 and V.F.W. Auxiliary #3048 with VFW Poppy Girls attended the City Council meeting as Poppy Day honoring those who served was declared.

aerial spray in the past,” she said.

A list of products used can be found on the Baker City website.

Glyphosate, most commonly known as Round-up and 2,4-D are used every spring, however specific product names vary by applicator.

“One clarifying point I did put in my report was that something had come up at the last meeting about Agent Orange, and that 2,4-D was Agent Orange. I just want to make clear that 2,4-D is not Agent Orange. 2,5,4-T with dioxin was the product. I’m not diminishing concerns. I just want to be clear and make sure there was not a misconception we were using Agent Orange,” Owen said.

Baker City is directed by an ORS to control noxious weeds (lists are on the website and in the ORS).

Owen indicated she had been in contact with Arnie Grammon, Baker County Vegetation Management and Weed District, and inquired about alternative options he may know about.

Owen said Grammon felt the City’s approach was fairly effective but a balanced approach is what he has seen in Baker County meaning some people have eliminated the reproduction of weeds by pulling them, mowing them before they go to seed, and some use a more natural type product, like vinegar. Some use herbicides.

Grammon indicated to Owen “that he supports the balanced approach, but feels what we are doing is appropriate for the requirements we have to contain the noxious weeds. City Staff is well versed on our applicators, I’m not. I’m not certified. We are aware of notification requirements and we do try and post.”

Public comment was taken in the matter. The first citizen to speak was Yvonne Da Torre, a resident of Elkhorn Village Apartments. She specifically made note to the upcoming date of April 30, which signifies the ending of the Vietnam War, 40 years ago tying together that significance with Agent Orange.

She said, “2,4-D and 2,4,5-T are 50/50 in Agent Orange so 2,4-D is a part of Agent Orange and we have a lot of generational problems with our Veterans, especially those from Vietnam. I was here at the last meeting on Tuesday.

On Wednesday an article was in the paper along with my letter to the editor and on Thursday my apartment complex, particularly me and two of my neighbors were sprayed with Round-up. I kinda thought someone was giving the middle finger salute on that one. The Mayor reassured me it wasn’t the town.”

Da Torre continued, “We have collected several letters of those that have been effected by this, I have several symptoms of poisoning by Round-up and so did my next door neighbor. I found her unconscious in the hallway and when awakened she was disoriented.

“After staying away for four days she returned home, let her dog outside who ate some grass and was ill for two days. Another neighbor asked the person spraying what they were spraying and was told Round-up.”

One of the symptoms Da Torre says is listed that she experienced was hostility. “I can guarantee you I had plenty, still have plenty. I was sick for over a week.”

Other symptoms Da Torre says she experienced were blurred vision, lung pain, sleeplessness, shortness of breath and palpitations as well as flu like symptoms.

According to Da Torre the person who sprayed did so on a windy day, on the bike path with people and pets around and no notice was given or signs posted before or after spraying.

“We three old ladies and two dogs are going to file a class action suit against the persons who sprayed us and the persons who ordered it, which was Beehive Homes. And for anyone else who thinks they can poison us in this way you can hold onto your pocketbooks because that’s where we’re going to hit you next!”

Mayor Mosier addressed Ms. Da Torre saying, “I was concerned when you called me and said that you’d been sprayed a day and a half after you’d come and talked with us about not wanting to be sprayed. I did speak with Mr. Kee who did some follow up.”

Mosier deferred to City Manager Kee who said, “We found that no City staff or contractors had sprayed during that week. Public Works did find that a contractor did do some spraying on private property near the bike path. I contacted our Department

of Agricultural investigator who is in Ontario and gave him the information.”

Owen confirmed she had spoken with the investigator in regards to vehicles the City uses when spraying.

Owen said she did go out to the site in question when the call was received but missed whomever was spraying and assured that they did take this complaint very seriously.

Da Torre said she had received a letter from the Department of Agriculture that the investigation was ongoing but vowed, “I’m not going to let this go. I’m not going to shut up so get used to seeing me.”

Others spoke to Council about the issue, citing what adversely effects one person might not bother another, illness caused from sprays and how there is big money behind products like Round-up.

The question was also raised as to whether or not an ordinance could be passed requiring users on private property to notify others by posting even a handwritten sign warning of spray usage.

Although initial consensus was that was not a plausible idea Council agreed that the issue needed more investigation and discussion. If other more natural products were available at a similar cost that are as effective that maybe be a move toward that needed to be made

“You have to understand though, even if it happens it probably won’t be this year,” Downing said in an effort to be diplomatic yet realistic.

Owen did discuss Aquifer storage and Recovery well use. She told Council that so far the water situation in Baker City is good. They can no longer collect water but as of now she didn’t see that as a problem even with Governor Brown declaring a State of Emergency for drought conditions in our County.

Kee also addressed council about developing a Mission Statement for the city and said he was going to e-mail suggestions to the council members in an effort to avoid a work session.

Kee also suggested an executive Session be held as soon as possible to address real estate issues.

That closed Executive Session was scheduled for Thursday April 30, 2015 at 6:00 p.m.