

Local

Sumpter City Council meeting proves tense

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Seats were packed at Tuesday night's Sumpter City Council meeting. County Commissioner Harvey and his wife, Lorie, also attended.

Despite the palpable tension and ongoing dissension throughout the meeting, the Council was able to pass several motions and heard reports from various departments.

The first item of dissension came up under bills to be paid. After discussion, the Council did not approve reimbursement of two expenses, which had not been preapproved by them.

The first was a locking filing cabinet purchased by Mayor Melissa Findley for the office at a cost of \$139 at Ryder Brothers.

The second expense was hotel room for the two individuals who attended the Oregon Festivals and Entertainment Association conference.

Councilperson LeAnne Woolf stated when she and then-mayor John Young attended, they paid for their own rooms and meals. She pointed out this year's attendees were already reimbursed for meals and gas.

Another contentious item in the bills was \$238 for meat to provide a BBQ for Flea Market vendors. Concerns included timing, who approved the expense, and why the Fire Department was not allowed to host the event as previously.

Findley responded that the Parks Manager has no budget per se to work with except for payroll. Regarding approval, she said there was precedence with the vendor luncheon last year, that it had worked well, and they wanted to make it well worthwhile for the Memorial Day Flea Market.

She also asked for patience until the final numbers on the Flea Market come in, stating that the cost of the event can be paid out of profits that this Flea Market made.

The Council voted three to two to approve all current bills except for the meat. This issue was tabled for the present.

Jeff McKinney, Utility Manager, led off his report by thanking Lee German for all his help over the past month. McKinney is coordinating with the Fire Department on opening fire lanes around the City and on a plan for opening the water system if there is

a fire and McKinney is not available.

McKinney asked that residents be using water conservation measures. He is working with the Fire Chief on a date to burn the burn pile. Tall grasses along City streets will be mowed or trimmed before it gets dry.

McKinney completed his Small City Water Certification and asked Council permission to take the next required water certification class in August at a cost of \$275. McKinney said as he has not been certified, he has been operating the water system under the supervision of Jason Green (Oregon Association of Water Utilities), who has provided his services to the City for free.

Green will soon have to begin charging the City the rate for a certified operator, which will come to about \$500 per month. McKinney believes he can be completely certified before then and stated that Green has already saved the City over \$40,000.

McKinney also reported lab results when the water supply was tested for 68 different chemicals. All came back as either non-detected or well within acceptable limits. The cost was \$2,034.

Findley commented that there must be communication when asking German to provide assistance. Nonemergency projects are approved through Council. In an emergency, approval must go through Findley or Head of Council Toni Thompson.

Jim Sheller gave the Fire Chief's report. There were three medical calls this month, including two during the Flea Market. The Firefighter I class is about half over and going well. The Department was able to sell their old truck for \$2000 during the Flea Market and will be able to buy 4 or 5 radios with the profits.

Findley suggested "surplussing" the City's old tender (water truck) and giving it to the Fire Department to sell for funds towards a new one. Motion passed unanimously.

Findley read the planning commission report. In the event of need, McEwen railroad station will be available to the City for an evacuation station. A lot line adjustment was approved by the Commission. A signature from one of the parties must be obtained before Council approves the adjustment. Findley then gave the Mayor's report. She and Councilperson Robert

Armbruster attended the DEQ Open House in La Grande. She reported a good discussion with Randy Jones, Scott Fairly, and Craig Sipp about a \$30,000 no-matching grant for a drinking water protection plan. She said there is an additional \$30,000 available through the IFA for a watershed protection plan. Jones said the City would be able to apply for both. Findley would like to follow up on these opportunities.

Council agreed they would like to see the paperwork on both. Findley also shared an opportunity to get a marketing intern from EOU at no cost to the City. This intern would research other small cities and help make a plan for how Sumpter can market itself better. This person would also have the ability to build a City website. Young, in attendance, warned Council to be careful of free programs that suddenly have a cost. Findley stated the proposal will be put in writing.

Anna Stafford, Parks Manager, reported she is trying hard to keep up with the grass which "jumps 4 1/2 inches every time it rains." Stafford said she is waiting on some information, but at this point, Flea Market income is in the positive. She will present a line item report at the next Council meeting for all attendees to review. There were 128 vendors in total, including those on private and City property.

Stafford asked to set up a separate meeting to address the many questions and concerns about the Flea Market, including questions about the vendor BBQ and blocking a fire access road. This will be held Friday, June 19th at 6:30 PM at the schoolhouse. Stafford stated she would appreciate it if anyone with concerns would communicate with her as they arise so that she can get resolution quickly. She shared that she received one kudos letter with a \$150 donation for the Flea Market.

Findley gave an update on the SLOT (strengths, limitations, opportunities, threats) meeting, saying there was a lot of great input. The ideas generated have been distributed to residents via the Mayor's Memo. Folks have until July 1st to pick their top ten from each category and e-mail, mail, or drop by the office. Findley stated they will then look for the constants and pull out the top five in each category.



Meghan Andersch / The Baker County Press

L-R LeAnne Woolf, Toni Thompson, Mayor Melissa Findley, Robert Armbruster, and Annie Oakley review minutes from the last meeting.

Findley reported the City attorney responded regarding the Council's ability to approve taking on the IFA loan for completing DEQ-mandated upgrades. This would exceed the City's indebtedness limit. The response was that the Council would need to determine if the cost of not taking on the loan would be greater than taking it.

The City can ask for an extension to avoid a \$250 daily fine starting in July. Findley asked council members Woolf and Oakley to work with City Recorder Julie McKinney on getting answers for what they need to do next. An Executive Session to resolve an employee complaint was set for 6/16 at 8 a.m..

Findley stated she wanted to "get on radar" potential opportunities to raise funds by selling the cell tower (proceeds would go to pay off land) and City-owned acreage above the effluent area. These will be discussed further at July's meeting.

Resolution 314 to move budget capacity within water, sewer, and street funds was passed unanimously. Woolf then moved that Findley be removed from oversight of City Staff. Findley asked why. Woolf stated expenditure by Parks Manager that would not be allowed by office staff, inclusion of the Fire Department as staff, sharing private personnel materials at an open meeting, and believing that staff would work better under someone else's governance. Findley replied that she is concerned that people want things to go on as

they have been with rules not followed, communication nonexistent, and many issues to be addressed. She said she is amazed that the Council would rather sit and nitpick at her than move on and get things done.

Several strong opinions were voiced by those in the attendance, including concern that the Council is being intimidated and manipulated by Findley and Armbruster.

Head of Council Thompson stepped in and stated she doesn't think the Council is being intimidated and that Findley comes up with some good ideas. She said she personally believes that Findley has had the best interests of the City in mind, but that she does not believe that Findley's style of communication with employees has been effective.

Thompson acknowledged, "Change is tough, no matter what you do." She said there may be misperceptions of Findley's actions and said, "The problem is that perception becomes reality. And with no communication, which is where we're at now, nothing happens. No one is listening to anybody."

Thompson said she thinks the ideas and actions Findley put into effect should continue.

The motion to remove Findley from supervisory capacity was carried with three votes for and two against. Thompson was nominated to take over supervisory duties. She stated she would accept, reluctantly, but that the ideas Findley implemented will continue. The nomination passed with three

votes for and two against.

New business was concluded with a discussion of a dog ordinance. There have been many complaints about loose dogs barking, chasing people, etc. Findley stated the 1975 ordinance on dogs was repealed and that the City has no way to enforce such an ordinance. She asked that people please be cognizant of their dog's behavior, especially when loose.

Thompson asked Mr. Harvey if he had a chance to go out and look at the roads. Harvey said he hadn't had opportunity and asked if the Road Department did a good job on Bourne Road. A portion of the road was rebuilt and oiled prior to the Flea Market to help with dust issues.

Young asked why the County is responsible for Bourne Road and not Austin. Both roads go through the City limits and then out into the county, and Austin gets more traffic. Harvey responded that they took advantage of availability to repair Bourne Road.

Harvey drew laughter when stating he would try not to answer the question completely, "because every town I go to will ask the same question."

Findley took a few minutes at the end of the meeting to respond to issues regarding job performance raised by Oakley in the previous meeting.

Thompson shared two recommendations of the budget committee. These are to increase sewer bills by \$2 per month and water by \$1 per month. This would bring the monthly water bill from \$57 to \$60.

BHS

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The BHS Class of 2015 chose retired Baker Middle School social studies teacher Bill Mitchell as commencement speaker and after much persistent prodding from the class, he agreed.

Mitchell taught social studies at the middle school for more than 30 years and after his retirement took a position with the United States Forest Service.

Mitchell based his speech on advice given in the song "Small Town," made popular by musician

John Mellencamp, who graduated from a small high school in Indiana. Lyrics to the song were tucked inside the diploma of each graduate. He advised the Class of 2015 to leave this small town in search of the path to a successful life. "Become something greater than just a high school graduate from a small town," Mitchell said.

He implored of the graduates to do for others through "calculated acts of kindness" carried out anonymously and repeatedly. And, he advised to embrace setbacks quoting Abraham Lincoln who himself lost eight elections and failed in two business ventures before becoming

who many consider one of the greatest American presidents: "My great concern is not whether you failed but if you're content with that failure."

BHS Principal Ben Merrill handed out diplomas, hugs, and handshakes to the graduates of BHS Class of 2015 in front of school district administration, board members, and enthusiast family members.

Given the weather conditions, the Class of 2015 motto, quoted from New Age and personal development author Shakti Gawain, seemed especially appropriate: "The more light you allow within you, the brighter the world you live in will be."

Buehler set to retire from OTEC

During their regular monthly board meeting held on June 2, Oregon Trail Electric's Board of Directors nominated and elected a new slate of officers.

George Galloway (Union County) has been elected chair, George "Austin" Bingaman (Union County) vice-chair with Charlene Chase (Baker County) elected as secretary/treasurer.

The OTEC board also

held their strategic planning session June 1. Items on the agenda included financial goals of the cooperative, conservation, distributed generation (DG), renewables, rate redesign and succession planning. As part of the succession planning discussion, Werner Buehler, general manager at OTEC, announced his plans for retirement in February 2017.

Buehler, 61, has been involved with the electric

utility business for over 44 years and has been general manager of OTEC for the past eight years.

"I want to give the board enough time so they can adequately search and go through the long vetting process. I'm honored to help them with that," he said, promising the transition would be as seamless as possible.

Buehler's final day with OTEC will be February 28, 2017.