

Local

Potential cell towers discussed

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Christine Smith, a Verizon representative from Portland, presented the Commission with the assurance that the towers would be noiseless and unstaffed other than for biweekly maintenance.

Smith told the Commission that cell phone use was doubling each year, with 39% of all households having switched to “pure wireless.”

Smith explained that 70% of 911 calls are now from cell phones, and that the capacity of current towers was no longer adequate to support the increase in demand.

Smith went on to explain that every industrial owner in both areas had been approached for their input on the towers.

She reassured the Commission that the proposed site on East Street would not affect most nearby properties negatively. “Verizon is committed to safety,” she explained, “and the towers are as minimally intrusive as possible. They will provide for present and future needs.”

Commissioner Chair Alan Blair stated, “I am unsure of your (Verizon’s) investment in contacting all potential landowners in the area. Why not co-locate on one of the light poles in Leo Adler field? They are already 80’ tall, and they would love a bit of extra income from leasing it to you.”

Smith explained that Ve-

rizon wanted to “give other companies the opportunity to co-locate their equipment on Verizon towers” and that “the FCC required the co-location whenever possible.” She further stated that the height requested was so co-location would be possible as 20’ per individual company’s equipment was necessary. She did not mention the amount Verizon charged other companies and, when asked directly, was unable to quote a figure

The public comments potion of the meeting was opened with Anne Mehaffey making the statement that “the criteria are not met for urban design” and there was no documentation of alternate sites being explored.

Whit Deschner stated, “This (the tower) is not a necessity; it’s visual pollution and I am against it.”

Kata Bulinski said, “I am in opposition. There are no benefits to Baker City. Fiber optic lines were installed 12 years ago and we were told we would all benefit but we are not benefiting yet. There is no need for this.” Her statement drew applause from the community members present.

Don Fink, the owner of the land the proposed tower would occupy, stated his support of Verizon’s plan. “The ten tall light poles with bright lights at Leo Adler field are more intrusive,” he said.

Brian Watt was opposed. He is concerned about visual pollution.

Penny Rienks, also opposed, has concerns about the towers being on the flight path of the Life Flight helicopters.

Ryc Rienks said, “The Verizon representative was unable to answer the good questions raised. She is not well prepared, not really able to provide good responses.”

Sean Peterson stated, “I am against both sites. The data presented by Verizon used national statistics. Baker is an anomaly.”

Terry Dever-Gee asked “what is the search range? Can there be one tower on one side of the city and one on the other? How about in the future? Will there be more?”

Gary Marlette reminded all present, “Rand McNally selected Baker City as one of the five most beautiful towns in America. Cell towers do not belong.”

After all speakers had the opportunity to state their concerns, the Commission took the motion to continue, and leave comments open until the next meeting.

Commissioners then considered the second proposed site, on 11th Street. This site is zoned industrial, so the variance requested by Verizon is 50’ for their 100’ tower.

Verizon representative Smith explained that all else in their application was the same as for the East Street site.

Public comments were opened.

Sean Peterson reiterated his concerns, adding that

he owned a rental home nearby and that he disliked the idea of his renters living next to a transmission tower.

“Many other co-location sites are available,” he said. “Even the Geiser Grand owners offered a hidden location in the cupola on their roof. We have all been invested in building Baker up, the towers will impact property and investment values.”

Byron Henry, a local rancher, told attendees, “I have three towers on my property. They pay \$1,500 per tower, per month. There is a loud whistling sound, like a big flock of birds, by the towers.” Henry went on to say, “I know the plan is for the towers to take over all the land lines.”

Terry Drever-Gee asked, “Why can’t we co-locate? What is the exit strategy if these towers don’t meet their needs? Will we just have non-working towers left there?”

Anne Mehaffey quoted the Baker County Development Codes regarding the protection of private owners.

The Commissioners came to the same conclusion with the second site application.

They requested that Smith, Verizon’s representative, gather information to answer the questions to which she had been unable to respond, and left comments open until the next Planning Commission meeting, October 14, 2015.

New 5J School Board member appointed

• SWIGER-HARRELL TO FILL RICH MCKIM’S VACATED POSITION

BY BRIAN ADDISON
Brian@TheBakerCountyPress.com

Baker School District 5J Board of Directors selected Autumn Swiger-Harrell to fill Board Position 4. The position was vacated by Richard McKim, on August 27, 2015, who resigned from the board after accepting a job with the Veteran’s Administration in Roseburg, Oregon. Swiger-Harrell fills the position, which expires in 2017. She joins fellow board members chair Kevin Cassidy, vice chair Melissa Irvine, Chris Hawkins, and Andrew Bryan.

Harrell, 41, joins the board after a recent appointment to the Baker School District Budget Board. She graduated high school from Baker High School and works as a physician’s assistant. Her interest in joining the school board was, in part, generated by the enrollment of her own young children in the district.

“I have been an active volunteer in our community and schools over the years but at this time I have a strong desire to contribute even more to the continued success of our schools with service on the Board. With this, there is a lot of responsibility and I am committed to educating myself as rapidly as possible to allow me to be a productive member of the team,” Swiger-Harrell wrote in her application letter.

“I grew up in Baker and as a successful product of the Baker School District, I have always been aware of the importance of the success of our school district,” Swiger-Harrell wrote. “Now that I have young children who are just starting their own educational journey, I am even more invested in the present and future well-being of our school district.”

The innovation of the district with development of the Baker Technical Institute and Eagle Cap Innovative High School were noted by Swiger-Harrell. “I look forward to bringing my own ability to think outside the box to a district with similar strengths,” she states.

Swiger-Harrell was sworn in and began her service on the all-volunteer board of directors during the school board meeting September 15, 2015.

Powder River cleanup brings 46 volunteers together at the river

BY TODD ARRIOLA
Todd@TheBakerCountyPress.com

Last Saturday morning, members of the Powder Basin Watershed Council (PBWC), with assistance from volunteers in the community, once again completed a successful cleanup event, which included the collection of trash from a two-mile local stretch of the Powder River, and the replacement of vandalized native shrubs.

The event, organized by the PBWC and held in both the spring and the fall, brought together a total of 46 volunteers (21 of which were 18 and under), including the Baker City Girl Scouts, Baker Technical Institute (BTI), Wells Fargo, and other local individuals, Anna Morgan, Outreach Coordinator for PBWC, said.

The volunteers filled 42, 35-gallon contractor garbage bags, for a total of 650 pounds of trash in 3 hours. The most common items found were cigarette butts, followed by food and drink containers, clothing, and construction material. Dead fish and birds were also found (some volunteers had waders and other types of boots), and the most interesting item collected was a suitcase, Morgan said.

“According to SOLVE (Stop Oregon Litter and Vandalism), cigarette butts

are the most common type of litter found worldwide. Cigarette filters are made of a type of plastic and do not biodegrade in the environment. They can introduce toxins into the environment of the food web if eaten by wildlife,” she said, noting they’re the #1 item of concern for her.

A Volunteer Ocean Trash Data Form, provided by Morgan, and later forwarded to the Ocean Conservancy in Washington, D.C., shows 351 cigarette butts were collected, along with 142 food wrappers, and 115 each of plastic grocery bags and other plastic bags. There were 57 plastic beverage bottles found, 48 straws/stirrers, 41 plastic bottle caps, 30 beverage cans, 29 paper cups and plates, 25 paper bags, 22 plastic takeout containers, 17 plastic lids, 10 tobacco packing/wrap, nine glass beverage bottles, six each of metal bottle caps and foam cups and plates, and other various items, including some not necessarily fully recorded.

PBWC Executive Director Johanna Sedell stood at the west end of Geiser-Pollman Park that morning, with volunteer sign-up sheets, bottled water, trash bags, gloves, and various other items, including PBWC information. She explained the reason for the replantings, the result of vandalism last May, in the City park by the river

at Kirkway and Hughes Lane (the northernmost point of the Leo Adler Memorial Pathway).

“In April we just did the cleanup, but this (the fall) is the best time of year to plant. The vandalism included a restitution payment, so, we’ve been waiting to get the plants back in until the fall. They came from The Plantworks, in Cove (a native plant nursery),” she said.

There were 29 plantings, Morgan said, which included Wood’s Rose, Wax Current, Redosier Dog Wood, Willow, Golden Current, Pacific Nine Bark, and Lewis’ Mock Orange (all native, found along the pathway). Supervising the replanting effort were BTI Aquaponics and Aquaculture teacher Burke Smejkal, and PBWC Outreach Coordinator Meghan Rorick. The volunteers periodically received positive comments from nearby bicyclists on the pathway, who were part of the Cycle Oregon event, though Smerjkal noted that a posted speed limit of possibly 5 to 10 miles an hour on that area of the pathway would be an improvement.

In an email to BTI students, Morgan said, “As far as the plantings go, all the hard work your class pulled off will help to improve river health on many levels. First, planting native plants in riparian zones provides more shade



Todd Arriola / The Baker County Press

Volunteers, 46 to be precise, cleaned up two miles of the Powder River, replaced vandalized shrubs and so much more last weekend.

for streams. Cold water holds more dissolved oxygen and supports native wildlife, including stronger immune systems in fish. The root systems of native plants provide structure and stability for stream banks. This helps not only improve the overall diversity and quality of soil life, but also prevents soil erosion from occurring. Native plants also provide habitat for wildlife. In fact, up to 93% of all wildlife in Oregon utilize riparian corridors during some point in their life cycle (according to SOLVE).

Lastly, a diversity of trees and shrubs slows down the flow of urban and agricultural runoff, and can filter out pollutants,

particularly heavy metals, which is essential to maintaining a healthy and vibrant river.”

Morgan said the Girl Scouts (who headed south from the Library on the pathway to Auburn Street, collecting trash) are currently looking for service projects to complete their Gold Award requirements, and, “We hope that this event sparked some ideas of interest and highlighted community issues that need solving.” Troop leader Norma Upmeyer can be reached at 541-403-9518.

“We were also very excited to partner with Baker Technical Institute and be able to offer community service hours for

attendance to the event... We hope to inspire a sense of stewardship in Baker Technical Institute students while also teaching them technical scientific skills to be used as they seek future career opportunities,” Morgan said.

“It is the first time we have had more than ten people at our cleanups and I hope it inspires community members to become more involved in future projects,” she said.

The mission of the PBWC is to “...promote, restore, and enhance the health of our watersheds through the cooperation of all stakeholders.” The PBWC can be contacted at 541-523-7288, or pbwced@qwestoffice.net.