

# Local

## County Commissioners make it through kerfuffle-free meeting

• MUSEUM, SUMPTER VALLEY RAILROAD, BIZ DEV AND OTHER UPDATES HANDLED

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The Baker County Board of Commissioners met for the first regular session of the month on Wednesday, at 9 a.m., in the Commission Chambers—a meeting that was controversy and altercation-free compared to recent meetings.

Present from the Board were Commission Chair Bill Harvey, Commissioners Mark Bennett and Tim Kerns, and Executive Assistant Heidi Martin.

Attendance also included Baker County Heritage Museum Director Lea Hoover, Baker County Fair Manager Angie Turner, Baker County Parks and Recreation Director Karen Spencer, Baker County Sheriff Travis Ash, Baker County Facilities Maintenance Foreman Dan McQuisten, Baker County Natural Resource Advisory Committee Coordinator Eric Wuntz, Art Sappington, Tork and Wanda Ballard, Ed Hardt, Chuck Chase, Cynthia Long, and Bobbie Danser.

After the Pledge of Allegiance and optional Invocation, both led by Harvey, the agenda was adopted, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Kerns. The minutes from the September 16, 2015 session were approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Kerns.

The Citizen Participation segment of the session included comments from Hardt, Chase, and Sappington.

Hardt voiced concerns about traveling over Dooley Mountain, with the potential dangers left from the wildfire.

He said, “I’m telling you, something’s got to be done up there... Look at those trees along the highway, look at the rocks that fall down. Something’s got to be done. In a couple of years, all those trees are going to be right over the highway, and it’s a danger.”

Harvey responded that he spoke with Forest Service officials, and they’re currently working on a remedy to that situation.

Chase stated the necessity to separately designate salvage trees and danger trees in the areas affected by wildfires, and Harvey responded that that also is a situation for which he and others are currently working on a remedy.

Sappington spoke about a Memorandum of Law he



Ed Hardt voiced concerns over the potential safety hazards on Dooley Mountain following the wildfire.

provided copies of to the Board, regarding public officials and management of public lands, including property transfer.

Hoover presented the Board with a Museum update, saying, “We’ve had a lot of changes in the Museum this year—completely new staff, new manager, I had a new assistant hired this year... We’ve had a successful year. Our numbers held steady throughout.” Major points she mentioned were a very large Kid’s Camp this year, with twice the number of children, a military-themed Central Gallery exhibit, the attendance of 100 visitors on Memorial Day, and a grant to replace the roof of the Leo Adler House next spring.

Turner presented the Board with a Fair update, stating that it was a huge success this year. She said a new door had been installed on the Show Barn by Ne-Hi Enterprises of Baker City, through a grant provided, allowing for more efficient people and animal traffic. She said, “Ne-Hi was great.”

She said the number of sponsors had increased this year, with a total in-kind sponsorship of \$8,979, and cash sponsorship in the amount of \$11,145, which, together, is about \$5,000 more than last year.

Spencer discussed with the Board a request for the transfer of ownership from Baker County Parks and Recreation Department to the Sumpter Valley Railroad Restoration, Inc. of “...the property situated in the County of Baker, State of Oregon, known as the Sumpter Valley Railroad Park located approximately five (5) miles southeast of the City of Sumpter...” according to the document. She said that the Parks Board recommended the transfer, upon which Baker County will be released from the financial obligation to maintain the day use area and sewer lagoon. The transfer was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Kerns.

McQuisten discussed a

request to purchase MPulse Silver Maintenance Software, with funds which have been set aside for this purpose, in the amount of \$7,000. Implementation of this Maintenance Management Software (MMS) program “...will provide a database for scheduling preventative maintenance, integrating work orders and repairs with existing records and tracking inventory,” according to McQuisten. The request was approved, with a motion from Kerns, and a second from Bennett.

The Board discussed an offer made to Kelly Atkinson of the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) from Baker County, for the purchase of the Baker Maintenance Shops (old ODOT building), in the amount of \$107,000 on a 10-year note at 3% (\$10,500 was paid to date from the County). This offer has not yet been fully negotiated.

Following a break during the session, several attendees provided some public comments regarding the government-to-government coordination meeting held on Wednesday, September 30, between the Board and personnel representing the U.S. Forest Service, in the Commission Chambers.

Several topics were discussed, including salvage logging, which Harvey regularly places a heavy emphasis on implementing. Other topics included watersheds, road closures/inventories, the Greater Sage-Grouse, monument designations, mining permit processing delays, restoration/reseeding, and public involvement with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

A letter from the Board in support of New Directions Northwest, Inc.’s submission for funds to implement the Strategic Prevention Framework Partnership for Success (SPF-PFS) Initiative, was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Kerns.

The SPF-PFS “...will be an effective initiative

that allows New Directions Northwest, Inc. to plan and implement strategies to prevent substance abuse in our community,” according to the letter.

Resolution No. 2015-1006, Designating An Enterprise Zone Manager, which amends Resolution No. 2015-1012, was approved, with a motion from Kerns, and a second from Bennett. Baker County Economic Development Director Greg Smith was designated, and the zone, in Baker County, is jointly co-sponsored by Baker County, Baker City and the City of Haines.

Order No. 2015-142, Re-Appointing Members To The Baker County Development Corporation (BCDC), was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Kerns. John Wilson and Sandy Sorrels were re-appointed, their terms set to expire on October 1, 2018.

An Intergovernmental Agreement in Support Of a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) was ratified, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Kerns. This agreement is in support of a Union County housing rehabilitation program.

A Medical Services Agreement between Baker County and Baker School District 5J was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Kerns. This agreement is for the operation of the School Based Health Center, covering the term July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2017. The Center receives, through state grants, \$60,000 in base funding, and an additional \$70,000 to run the new behavioral health program, according to the document.

An Agreement between Baker County and New Directions Northwest, Inc. was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Kerns. The agreement covers the period of July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016, and includes psychiatric/mental health services performed at the Baker County Jail.

## Community Connection has new vanpool

BY GINA K. SWARTZ  
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A new opportunity has presented itself to Jodi Tool, Transportation Options Coordinator for Community Connection. Mick Pickler from Outdoor RV in La Grande contacted Frank Thomas the transit manager at Community Connection in La Grande with an idea that would be beneficial to his company as well as those seeking employment.

Pickler has teamed up with Kelly Jenkins of Enterprise Ride Share, a division of enterprise rental cars, in an effort to provide a vanpool service to strengthen his workforce and provide an option for potential Baker County employees to join his team. Thomas contacted Tool about the opportunity.

Tool said, “They contacted us several months ago in regards to vanpool options, transportation options because they were having difficulty finding employees due to transportation issues. There wasn’t a big selection of people in La Grande that were applying at that time but because of unreliable transportation for Baker County residents they didn’t want to go that route either as far as having to rely on the employees driving themselves.”

According to Tool, in the past there have been a high number of hired employees that are not able to commit to work because of transportation issues, vehicle breakdowns or missed rides and as Tool explained Pickler indicated they want to hire people, they have just had such bad luck with employees once they get hired and if Outdoor RV is unable to meet their supply then ultimately everyone suffers. They have to find reliable employees and therefore, Outdoor RV seeking secured rides. With the assistance of Tool Community Connection can help connect vanpool vehicles, maintained by Enterprise Ride Share, employers and employees. Enterprise Ride Share guarantees if a vehicle breaks down they will repair or replace it by the next business day.

Tool said, “They (Enterprise Ride Share) also have backup rides in place to assist with getting employees where they need to be just in case of unforeseen issues. If there are alternating schedules, those can be coordinated too.” Tool indicated that Community Connection was also willing to put riders on the inner city bus they operate to accommodate employer and employee. “Between Ride Share and Community Connection we are going to verify that there is that transportation is available.”

She is coordinating with the Oregon Employment Department to find employees interested in the prospect. “We could pick up somebody in Haines, North Powder, even Union. We can coordinate so people can be picked up mid trip,” she said. In order for the Vanpool to work effectively there would need to be 4-6 employees so that it could be financially doable for an employee.

“When you break down the costs over the month it is \$6-\$8 per day,” said Tool. “So, If you have someone who only has one vehicle amongst their family they could be looking at going and having to purchase another vehicle, so you have a car payment, insurance, maintenance on the vehicle and gas so you are looking at upwards of \$800 per month. That is the national average. We have had several people interested but we are not quite up and running yet. We have to have a driver. What we have run up against is that even though we had some that were hired and wanted to go to work there, they didn’t have a driver’s license. So we are trying to opening up things more and now have the employment department working with us trying to find more candidates. We have put flyers in the Union, North Powder and Haines utility bills also trying to get the word out. The vanpool is a suggested requirement for being hired at Outdoor RV and they have excellent benefits, excellent pay. Right now we are looking for employees that want to go work there. There are lots of different jobs out there. There are people that clean the trailers there are people who weld all kinds of different things and what I’ve heard is they will do the training if necessary, they are just looking for hard workers that are going to show up and going to do the job.”

Tool said, “I don’t know the extent of the driver’s record that they check but they do check to make sure the driver’s license is valid and insurance is included in the monthly fee and of course the more people you get riding it the cheaper the cost is going to be to the employees.”

Community Connection will not be providing the driver. Tool said, “We’d like to go and visit with the County Commissioners as well. I mean why wouldn’t your County Commissioners want to help support something like this when it is going to benefit their County. Hopefully we will have workers traveling in both directions one day. Maybe a business here, say Natural Structures needs employees, we can help with the transportation for employees to Baker from Union County.”

Even though they are only working with one specific employer right now, Tool would like to see this program expanded down the road. “We want to use this as our success story. A model of ‘look this is working for them and this is what can work for everybody.’”

Community Connection is so behind getting this program initiated, they have offered to sponsor a seat in the first vehicle started for an unspecified period of time. This program appears to be a win-win for everyone. The Oregon Employment Department confirms that Outdoor RV is looking for approximately 50 employees and with this vanpool prospect, transportation is no longer a barrier for potential candidates.

“The Employment Department has been actively working with us to promote this and find employees,” she said.

Contact Dan at the Baker City office to apply or for more information.

## Hells Canyon traffic affected

Crews began cleaning the roadsides along the road between Brownlee Reservoir and Hells Canyon Dam on Monday. The work is expected to last through November.

Travelers in Hells Canyon should use extra caution in the coming weeks as numerous projects could result in road restrictions

or traffic delays.

Starting Monday, Oct. 5, road crews will begin clearing rocks, trash, vegetation and other debris along the road.

Crews will be working from 6 a.m.–6 p.m. Mountain Time, Monday through Friday, from Oct. 5 through Nov. 30. Traffic will be restricted to one

lane in areas where work is taking place. Flaggers will be on hand to direct traffic. Long delays are not expected.

Also on Monday, the Homestead Tunnel will be closed weekdays through Oct. 16.

The tunnel, on Homestead Road near Oxbow, will be closed from 8

a.m.–5 p.m. MDT, with a 30-minute opening at noon to allow traffic to pass.

A detour road will be available for passenger cars and light trucks. Those with recreational vehicles, large trucks or trailers should plan an alternate route or travel on weekends.