

Local

City Council

CONTINUED FROM
PAGE 1

Councilor Langrell spoke, stating he felt having Eric Owen on the Airport Board was a conflict since his wife was public Works Director Michelle Owen.

Mike Kee assured Council since no money was involved it was not a conflict.

"Well, I for one will not vote for him," said Langrell.

Councilor Downing moved to approve Owen to the airport board with a second by Councilor Lowe, all councilors voted to approve except Langrell.

Councilor Lowe then moved to approve Constantine to the tree board with a second by Councilor Thomas, that vote was unanimous.

"I'd like to thank those citizens for stepping forward," said Mosier.

Council next heard from Blue Mountain Community College (BMCC).

The presentation was given by Dan Koopman, BMCC Baker County Center Director.

He depicted trends and demographics seen over time, the last 10-years and currently.

He noted that in strong economic times enrollment generally decreases and in weaker times enrollment rises however the enrollment rate in Baker County has remained fairly steady regardless.

Jeff Nelson, who is part of BMCC's Small Business Development Center, addressed Council as to the role the SBDC plays helping establish new businesses and sustain current businesses in our community.

He spoke briefly about the newest program that was started last year at Powder River Correctional Facility and has been very successful thus far.

In fact, as Nelson indicated, others in the state wanted to use them as a model to begin their own programs.

Mosier commented that at the last Council meeting a presentation had been made by BTI regarding moving in a direction of becoming an accredited college, and she asked the question of where that fit in with their picture of the future.

BMCC president Cam Preus was present and

addressed Council regarding that issue, stating the conversations were just beginning to happen and the road was still being travelled. Mosier mentioned access and space being of concern, to which Preus agreed and advised new space was being sought either by being purchased or built and as far as access, she assured everyone that what was being offered was state-of-the-art.

Many classes were being offered by telecom which until recently wasn't an option so therefore two students from Baker, four from Milton-Freewater and five from Boardman, for example, had access to a class that would not have been available to them before because it was not feasible to have a class for only two or three people.

Preus commented that for future offerings she was embarking on a survey of Baker County Residents to see what they would like to see BMCC offer to them or this community.

Lowe asked a question regarding how the tax-based money was accounted for and utilized.

Preus advised that there was a budget board and all monies used are very transparent and she offered a copy of the recent financials to Lowe and the rest of the Council to inspect to which Councilor Lowe thanked her.

Council then turned its attention to what was mostly filling the room a discussion revolving around the annual Hells Canyon Motorcycle Rally.

Mosier turned the proceedings over to Police Chief Wyn Lohner, slipping and calling him Officer Lohner, as the crowd laughed.

Chief Lohner asked, "Do you know something I don't?"

Mosier apologized for her slip and Lohner continued on, giving a brief background of the event, which began in 2006 with a few friends riding their motorcycles to Baker City. The event has grown steadily every year into what it is now with several thousand attendees every year and numerous vendors.

Lohner advised Council of a meeting that had been held after the last Motorcycle Rally in July 2015 and what had transpired from that meeting that had been held "in an effort to



Gina K. Swartz / The Baker County Press

Bev Calder testifies in front of City Council about the HCMR.

make the event better," said Lohner.

There were no complaints or concerns raised by ODOT or Economic Development, and HBC's only concern was that sidewalks be kept clear for ADA access.

Public Works mentioned a concern regarding 2nd Street being the only detour street.

There were concerns voiced from businesses about vendors and the length of street closures.

Lohner also clarified to the Council why he and the police department are so involved in the event, and advised that in his opinion with his department being so hands-on in the event, it has helped the event become and remain virtually incident-free.

Lohner said, "I haven't had a single business owner who has ever come to me or to my knowledge come to the City manager or anyone else that works for the city and said, 'This event has got to go away.' Everybody I've spoken to—and I believe everybody I've seen that I know in the audience tonight, are very supportive of this event and of the benefit to our community, and to our region. They recognize the value of that."

Before calling citizens forward to speak, Mosier added, "I have not heard from anyone who wants this event to go away or move from our City or County. It is a large event because it is very popular and very well-loved, but a large event does have a large impact, and that's why we are here."

Lowe asked if there were taxes or fees that the City collected from the event.

He was informed that

all fees collected were paid to the organizers of the event; however, motel rooms that were rented during the event collected tax that was distributed to the City and County. The High School collected approximately \$10,000 for camping fees during the event, which they utilized for sporting events, etc., and the City had also seen benefits in the purchase and help with maintenance of new drug dog, Capa.

Of the several citizens who spoke to council, business owner Beverly Calder, who owns Bella on Main Street and is a member of the Transient Lodging Tax (TLT) Commission, spoke.

"As a Commission, we love this event; it's a huge event that brings so many people. The effect the rally has had over the last 10 years is it brings a lot more motorcycle traffic and that's really great for lodging and really great for restaurants," said Calder.

She noted that the TLT takes some of the monies collected during the Motorcycle Rally to market Baker City.

She said, "I'm asking the Council and the Chief to look at the impact of a large-scale closure in the height of season. We're out marketing Baker City but we might get someone into town who can't get to our 'crown jewel' that has been marketed all over the county for three or more days, it's frustrating to visitors."

"Everybody loves walking downtown and seeing those shiny machines, but one of the biggest challenges as a business district and from a tourist standpoint is getting here, and that's not just tourists, that's people who live here, people that support

those businesses 365 days a year, and we all know those people like to park at the front door. That's just a given."

Several other community members addressed Council all had good things to say about the Rally. Some offered suggestions of moving the main focal point to Resort Street and utilizing Court Plaza and Central Park.

Others discounted the idea as Court Plaza is not yet competed and cited safety concerns with Resort Street not being wide enough.

Some felt too many changes were going to drive motorcyclists away and be detrimental to the overall success of the Rally while others felt it was for the betterment of the community.

Businesses on the south end of Main Street did express slight concern about everything being situated at the North end of Main Street, but in the end it was decided that the proposed map and closures that has been sent out to local business recently, be used and maybe reconfigured upon speaking further with some of the concerned parties, then readdressed before the Rally in July.

Lohner did advise Council he had received a text message during citizen comments with what he thought was a good idea from Lisa Wilson at the Sunridge Inn suggesting letting vendors use empty Main Street Store fronts during the rally so as to not detract from local business and increase foot traffic on Main Street.

Dennis Hackney from ODOT also addressed council informing them he is the one who issues the permits for the street

closures, since Main and Broadway are considered State Highways and not simply city streets, and assured them that even an oversized truck that had to make a detour during the Rally didn't mind, so there were no issues foreseeable from an ODOT standpoint.

Larry Abell, Historic Baker City President addressed Council, informing them of where the monies they had budgeted for them had been spent.

Abell discussed projects they were working on such as recent renovations to 1911 events they had helped sponsor, and other small projects they were working on.

Abell also gave exciting news of a match grant HBC had received from Ford Family that will match all new memberships up to \$15,000.

That opportunity lends to the possibility of hiring a full-time downtown manager—an exciting prospect for them that can open a whole new realm of possibilities.

City Manager Kee advised Council that recruiting firm Slavin Management had received well over 20 applications for his position, and would narrow down prospects for them. But with the background checks and interviews, they may need to consider the possibility of not having a new City Manager hired by the end of April as planned, but more likely the end of May.

He indicated a conversation would need to be had as to the option of whether to extend his contract or not.

He advised he would be happy to stay on to help get through the budget process if need be.

Merrill outlines plans for new Eagle Cap job

BY SUNNY WERNER
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Current Baker High School principal, Ben Merrill, will be tackling a new venture in the coming 2017 school year: He will be moving over to the old North Baker School building as the Eagle Cap principal and the Director of Instructional Technology.

Merrill will be breaking new ground as the position, Director of Instructional Technology, is new to 5J.

Merrill says the key to his approach is "identifying ways to enrich classroom learning."

He plans to travel

between all 5J District schools weekly, both addressing issues as they arise and also assisting teachers and identifying areas in which more training for staff is needed.

The new technological platform includes valuable sites already in use, such as the "Family Link" in which parents are able to keep abreast of the work their children are doing in class daily, their current grades, homework turned in, and so on.

Merrill is also planning a complete inventory of all electronic devices owned by the District, a digital repository.

This will be a large undertaking, but when finished, will provide an

instantly accessible report that will list device, date placed in operation, service work done, upgrades, etc.

Having this complete database will allow more specific budgeting as the projected lifespan of each device will be listed.

Consequently, the information about which devices are nearing the end of use will be available for budget planning purposes. Merrill also spoke about the current waste of resources.

"Sometimes a device will quit working, and the teacher's request for repair isn't answered. So they set that device aside, and use another. This, happening across the District, can mean we might have sev-

eral devices that just need some technical work to be useful again."

When asked about how he plans to organize his days, Merrill says he thinks he will begin and end each day at North Baker, with travel as needed during the day.

He says he is looking forward to working as the Principal for Eagle Cap, the position currently filled part-time by Jerry Peacock. (Peacock is also the Director of Baker Technical Institute).

"I'll carry on what Jerry has begun," he said. "Many of the students do better with the flexibility we can offer here in Baker. They can attend BHS part-time, come in to Eagle Cap, or

use Web Academy, and take courses at Baker Technical Institute—whatever best meets their needs and situation."

Merrill's professional history includes the integration of Instructional Technology and bricks-and-mortar schools. While principal at Salmon River High School in Riggins, Idaho, he developed an online school, "Savage Academy," which is still being utilized by the Salmon River high school.

In Notus he was Superintendent of Schools, before moving to Baker and accepting the position of BHS principal.

Merrill explained that, much as he enjoys working at BHS, he welcomed the

new opportunity.

"The hours, especially with sporting events lasting into the evenings, and my interest in being as involved in the community as much as possible, has led to my not being available to my family," he said. "I have my girls half-time, and they were very excited when I told them I'd be able to spend much more time with them."

Merrill had been on City Council as well as a member of several service clubs.

He resigned from them all to devote more time to his young family.

He will be beginning studies for his doctorate in April.