

# Local

## City discusses rate increases, new Community Developer job

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Potential water and City fee increases were the main topics at Tuesday's Baker City Council meeting. The meeting marked the very first preliminary discussion on the issue for this coming fiscal year.

### Vietnam Veteran Recognition Proclamation.

Mayor Mosier read a proclamation in recognition of Vietnam War veterans, in thanks of their service and sacrifices, and those of their families. March 29 is now officially "Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day."

### 2016-2017 City Fees.

Finance Director Jeanie Dexter pointed out that the night's discussion was "just a preliminary discussion." Dexter presented a 19-page spreadsheet with any possible changes to fees highlighted.

The Council sets all City fees annually by resolution. The public is encouraged to attend the April City Council meeting for further discussion, and invited to come to City Hall to talk with Dexter about any fee concerns or ideas.

Said Dexter, a fee increase of 1.2%, based on the rural Consumer Price Index (CPI-W) was used. She mentioned in past years the CPI-W had shown an increase of 3-5%, but had not shown an increase last year.

Most business license and event fees were recommended unchanged.

One new fee proposed for the Police Department was added, said Dexter, "simply to reimburse us for the cost of board" for "off animals." She said animals such as horses and peacocks had been impounded in the past. This fee would be billed at actual cost.

Fire Department fees, including ambulance rates are proposed to be raised at the 1.2% rate, bringing that rate to \$1,028 for residents and \$1,542 for nonresidents.

Cemetery rates received the same proposed hike in order to adjust for increasing contractor and other costs. These increased would affect burials, grave space, mausoleum space, etc.

The one fee proposed at a significant increase was a jump from \$100 to \$250 from the Planning Commission involving Type III procedures, which involve

appeals.

### 2016-2017 Water Rates.

Dexter pointed out that she had deliberately separated the water rates section on the agenda from the fees, as the focus turned to capital improvement projects. An example of one such project would have been the new UV water treatment system, which necessitated a 5% hike at that time.

The City foresees a number of high-dollar projects coming down the pike in the next few years, which will need prioritized in the face of a limited budget.

One such project is a \$2-million-dollar City well for backup water supply; another is a sewer system maintenance and upgrade project anticipated to come in at the \$5-7 million range.

According information included by Dexter, "The Council adopted the Water Facilities Master Plan prepared by Murray, Smith & Associates (MSA) on March 8th. This plan included a comprehensive review and evaluation of the City's water systems and consideration of needed capital improvement for the transmission, treatment and distribution systems. MSA identified the need for \$6.2 million in capital improvement projects over the 5-year horizon and \$33.4 million over the 6-to-20-year horizon. MSA recommended that the City raise water rates and pursue other funding sources to make the necessary improvements in the system."

MSA recommended an immediate water rate increase of 10%.

The City's current rate structure is as follows: Base charge (¾" meter) - \$32.76\* per month plus water usage in excess of three units per month charged at \$0.69\* per unit, including the proposed 1.2% increase.

One unit of water is approximately 750 gallons. Therefore, customers may use up to 2,250 gallons of water each month without incurring additional charges.

Council will be reviewing the 2016-17 Three-Year Water Capital Plan at the April 12th council meeting.

Dexter presented a number of scenarios involving base rate versus usage rate increases with associ-

ated revenue projections, in order for Council and the public to begin discussing potential increases.

Baker City currently has the 65th highest water rates out of 117 Oregon cities.

### Court Plaza Grant.

Council approved a motion to support the submission of a new grant to the State that would complete construction of Court Plaza, connecting it to the Parkway and Central Park.

By submitting the grant and accepting it if won, the City would be committing to the \$300,000 project. \$50,000 currently exists in the account for this project. The grant would provide 60% of the total project cost, but would require the City fund the remainder, and that the project would be completed within one fiscal year.

### Golf Course Concessionaire RFP.

City Manager Mike Kee presented a draft Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit a new golf course concessionaire. Bill Tiedemann currently holds a three-year contract for that role, which he will not seek to renew when this last year is up.

Initially, Tiedemann and the City had anticipated that as supervisor under that contract, he would be able to earn approximately \$65,000 per year, but the reality was \$20,000 during the first year and \$45,000 during the second.

Tiedemann said he opted to put the difference in funds back into the golf course, as his goal had always been to improve it.

Councilor Langrell asked why the "project was completely ignored"—referring to an idea begun two years back to potentially implement a nonprofit Board of Directors at the golf course.

Tiedemann said he was no longer sure the "pain was worth the gain" and that while the accounting system was in place that would allow a move to a nonprofit, the only strong benefit he saw in that transition would be more grant opportunities.

Kee said the revenue from the golf course was fairly predictable, and not at a high enough level to necessitate the change, in his opinion.

### Community Developer.

Following recent economic discussions with the County and Economic Development Director Greg

Smith, City Manager Mike Kee tossed out the idea of creating a new "Community Developer" position at the City level, in part to "have a better sense of what the community developer was doing."

In one scenario, this position might report to the City Manager, work on Council projects, complete grants, keep a log of available space for businesses, work on special projects and events, serve as a liaison with the Chamber and Historic Baker City, and coordinate items such as street closures during events.

An idea was that the position might be funded by Transient Lodging Tax (TLT) revenue.

Councilor Lewis began by expressing confusion about adding a new layer to existing economic development efforts, for which \$8,000 per month is already being spent through the County-managed efforts of Greg Smith. In addition, Tim Bishop is in place promoting tourism. Lewis, like several of the other councilors, felt more discussion would be important to better understand the issues surround the idea of the position.

While batting around ideas, Kee responded that one option might be to review and look at modifications to Smith's contract with the County.

Councilor Langrell said, "We've created enough government positions in this town," and stated that such a position could turn out to be "a frilly, happy little position" that "doesn't do a whole lot."

Langrell spoke to what he believes is past mismanagement of TLT funds.

Councilor Lowe expressed perhaps the most initial interest in the new position, stating it could be "valuable" and in the City's interest as the City would have increased control over the economic development activities that happen within City Limits and that utilize City revenue sources. He said the current situation provides "no central focus" for the City.

Mosier emphasized the importance of continuing the discussion about this possible position at future meetings.

Right now, she said, the City "has a voice but not control" over economic development issues.

She said that in past conversations with Smith, he mentioned that community development was not his strong suit, that rather, his office was more focused on business recruitment. She relayed that Smith was "not looking to fill Main Street store fronts."

Council intends to speak further with Baker County Commissioners at a regular County Commissioners Session, and go from there.

### City Manager Recruitment Update.

Kee informed Council that 11 semi-finalists had been selected by the recruiting firm, Slavin, with supplemental questions submitted to them. A report from Slavin is expected to be provided to the City next week.

## WIC changes

WIC, Oregon's public health nutrition program, is offering its families a new way to shop for WIC food benefits using an EBT (electronic benefit transaction) card. Baker County WIC started converting families to eWIC on March 7th, 2016 and will be converting participants until June 2016.

Currently, participants of WIC, a program of the Oregon Health Authority's Public Health Division, use paper vouchers to buy the healthy WIC foods. Now, with this new card, shopping will be easier and WIC families will be able to better track their monthly food balance. Participants will also have access to a new WICShopper Smart Phone App allowing them to scan a food's bar code to determine if it is a WIC allowed food.

WIC provides services at over 100 clinic sites throughout Oregon and serves 161 thousand lower-income pregnant women, infants and children under age 5. These WIC families shop at more than 500 Oregon grocery stores, pharmacies, farm stands, farmers' markets and spend \$64.7 million a year with their WIC food benefits. In Baker County 371 women, infants and children use WIC and \$227,179 was spent last year at local WIC stores and farmers' markets for healthy foods. Each participant saves about \$60 on groceries each month. Anna Clark, WIC Coordinator states, "WIC is excited to offer a new, convenient way for our families to shop."

Baker County WIC has been offering participant-centered nutrition education, healthy foods, breastfeeding support and has been serving as a gateway for preventative health for over 40 years. It is considered one of the most successful, cost effective and important nutrition intervention programs in the county. Baker County WIC has appointment openings.

Hours are Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. (closed noon to 1:00 p.m. for lunch). The Health Department also has a walk-in clinic for WIC one day per month.

Participants or interested families can follow Baker County Oregon Health Department on Facebook for walk-in information. For more information about WIC, visit Baker County Health Department at 3330 Pocahontas Rd, call 541-523-8211 or visit [www.healthoregon.org/wic](http://www.healthoregon.org/wic).

## Juntura cutoff road gets funding

The Oregon Legislature, in the short 2016 Session just ended, approved \$2 million of funding for the Juntura Cutoff Road Project in Malheur and Harney Counties. The funding will complete the \$6.9 million dollar sum needed for the project which will reconstruct the failing road, providing essential support for local industry, ranching access, and recreational opportunities.



Submitted Photo.

The Juntura Cutoff Road is of high importance for local economic development partners. The extraordinarily poor condition of the 7-mile long road has dramatically increased the cost of the mining operations conducted by EP Minerals, one of Malheur County's largest employers. Currently, the road serves as the main access point to the mine and a transportation route from the mine to EP Mineral's production facility in Vale. E. P. Minerals, Malheur County Economic Development, Business Oregon, ODOT, and Regional Solutions have coordinated to construct a financial package to fund the estimated \$6.9 million project. To date, they had secured approximately \$5.4 million. The \$2 million allocation from the Legislature will complete the funding for the project.

"E.P. Minerals, Malheur County Economic Development, Business Oregon, ODOT, Regional Solutions and both Malheur and Harney Counties have done great work in finding available funds to fix this critical access road," said Representative Cliff Bentz (R-Ontario). "The fact that a substantial portion of the mine is located on a State of Oregon School section of land, generating some 500,000.00 per year in mineral royalties to the state, certainly helped in making the argument that the state should contribute to the project. I am pleased the Legislature has recognized the importance of this project and has allocated \$2 million to finish the funding package. This has truly been a team effort."

In addition to supporting local business and industry, the Juntura Cutoff Road serves as a point of entry to both state and federal lands for recreational opportunities. During fire season, the road also serves as one of the few access points for firefighters to protect a significant amount of BLM rangeland.

In 2015, Rep. Bentz presented the Juntura Cutoff Road, and the mine that it serves, as an economic development opportunity at the Oregon Business Summit, and later to several legislative committees. Rep. Bentz thanks Senator Betsy Johnson, who, volunteering the use of her private airplane, flew a number of legislators to Ontario a year or so ago for the express purpose of touring the road and the mine. He also thanks Rep. Greg Smith for his work. Their efforts played a significant role in the positive outcome of this funding effort.

### Estate/Moving Sale

At: 1035 1st. Ave. So. Payette, Idaho ♦ 10 a.m. MDT  
Saturday, April 2, 2016

**Terms:** Cash or bankable check day of sale. No merchandise removed prior to settlement. 10% buyers premium. Concessions available on site.

**Auctioneers Note:** Roland and Paula Davidson have been long time residents of Payette. They are downsizing and no longer need this clean, quality estate. For a complete listing and pictures visit our web site, [WWW.snakeriverauction.com](http://WWW.snakeriverauction.com). Plan on attending this really nice auction.

- ♦ **Vehicle:** 1978 Triumph Spitfire convertible, ready to restore.
- ♦ **Stair Lift Chair:** Bruno CRE2110 Electra III stair lift chair, like new.
- ♦ **Collectables:** Exceptional selection of antique and vintage furniture and small collectables to include Dietz, and vintage books.
- ♦ **Furniture and Appliances:** Kenmore; Laz-e-Boy; and Burlington.
- ♦ **Shop and Misc:** Scotts; Yard King; Weber; Rubbermaid; Hitachi; Skilsaw; many more brand names.

Sale Conducted by **Snake River Auction L.L.C.**

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