

# Local

## City Council: Capital Plan approved, goals postponed

BY KERRY McQUISTEN  
News@TheBakerCountyPress.com

Much of Tuesday evening's Baker City Council meeting revolved around Capital Plan Review and acceptance, with all councilors present.

### Capital Plan.

The Capital Plan, which involves major storm water, water and wastewater projects, is a three-year plan. Said Public Works Director Michelle Owen, "It's how we move forward into creating a budget."

Owen said that the plan had gone through the Public Works Advisory Committee prior to being submitted to Council. In committee, it is gone over "page by page, line by line."

According to Owen, funds are in place to complete the projects outlined for the first year—but not the next two, necessitating fee increases.

The Council has asked Finance Director Jeanie Dexter to compile a number of scenarios demonstrating various base and/or water usage rate increases for review at a work session prior to the next City Council meeting.

The problem, in a nutshell, is that even with a 10% or 25% rate increase, the City will still fall short of the amount needed to cover the larger projects deemed necessary over the course of three years. There is a chance to close the gap remaining by taking out a low interest loan or applying for a variety of state or federal monies available to meet that deficit.

The questions Council is tackling include how much of the deficit to close utilizing rate increases, if to continue moving toward all the recommended projects, or perhaps adjusting the timeframe for completion.

Owen explained that year one projects such as laying already purchased pipe, working to secure the water rights for a potential backup well, reservoir meter replacement and correction of some fire flow deficiencies are funded.

Year two projects including purchasing and laying more pipe for the mountain line, replacing hydrants and adding water line extensions, and developing the next phase of the backup well plan and design.

Year three means more mountain line work, well construction and more fire flow deficiency corrections.

Owen clarified that the proposed backup well isn't mandated, but rather, a backup water source.

"There's nothing wrong with our current well," she stated, but pointed out that in a crisis, there would be some question as to the water quality and capacity of the water.

A well system wouldn't

require UV treatment, simply chlorine.

Dexter pointed out that the budget constrains the scope of projects, and being an annual document, could be altered during any given year.

Mayor Mosier said of the well, "It's the responsible thing to do because we don't want to be looking back in hindsight, wishing we'd secured our water."

Councillor Abel asked if a water rate hike would disproportionately affect small businesses.

Dexter believed off the top of her head that most small businesses would be affected no more than most residential customers, but offered to look into the numbers for the City's top ten water uses, such as 5J, RV parks, the prison, etc.

In terms of wastewater projects, some old terracotta pipes are in need of replacement downtown, as well as some manholes—but affluent disposal options were highest of the list.

Storm water projects included video inspections, new catch basin installation, etc.

### Pavement Plan

After the Capital Plan was approved, Council moved on to the Pavement Plan, which was also approved and defines the pavement budget over the coming year.

Final projects are primarily on Auburn, with patches on Cedar and 17th, among others.

"To bring streets up to the quality we would all like them to be," said Owen, "would cost \$6.7 million."

The City has just over half a million dollars budgeted.

Discussion ensued regarding information gathering on the impact of a proposed gas tax or other fees to enable more street repairs.

Of the councilors, Lowe seemed most enthusiastic about the idea of finding more revenue while Mayor Mosier cautioned that such a move may not go over well with the public, particularly on the heels of a water rate increase.

### Resolution 3771—Sidewalk Grant Rules

This year it was found that the grant process as it now stands worked smoothly last year.

The resolution sets aside 75% of the money collected for citizen grants and 25% for public projects.

Applications would become available the first week of May in this reimbursement grant. Money would be available July 1. 3771 was adopted.

### Non-represented Employee Wage Report.

Employees haven't received a wage adjustment in a couple years. A merit increase ordinance was mentioned.

Non-represented employees are not in a union or bargaining unit. They are usually supervisory or

management employees.

According to City Manager Mike Kee, the 19 or so employees in this category has above satisfactory performance, they would be eligible for a 2% merit increase. This increase would not affect wage scales.

Kee said no adjustments have been made to the actual wage scale in the five years he'd worked for the City, and suggested added 2% to every step on the wage scale within each job description, which would be particularly effective for long-term employees who had topped out on their scale.

Employees would not be eligible for these raises for subpar performance.

Kee compared salaries to those in other cities.

Langrell suggested comparing them to average salaries within Baker City instead. He said City jobs are already the best paid jobs in Baker City.

Kee disagreed. Mosier then asked if there was flexibility to negotiate a base rate when hiring a new employee, and Kee responded there was.

Meanwhile, without that new resolution, Kee will continue to follow the current merit system.

### Goals

Resolution 3772—Adoption of Council Goals was postponed until the next City Council meeting. At present, a draft of the goals (subject to change) is as follows:

Continue support of parks and outdoor spaces

- Complete Court Plaza pursuant to grant award.

- Continue to make regular maintenance of parks, pathway, and playground equipment a priority.

- Explore pathway extension options.

- Work on access and improved utilization of Central Park

- Pursue a concessionaire contract that promotes sustainability of the golf course.

- Continue to promote communication and collaboration with Community partners and Government entities

- Identify opportunities

- Recognize community partners (non-profits, prison, etc.)

- Complete 911 contract revisions.

- Encourage combined meetings with other local entities to find additional means collaboration.

- Develop a wastewater disposal plan

- Continue regular communication with DEQ

- Identify viable wastewater options

- Enhance Community livability

- Adequate staffing to provide efficient police and fire services to account for increased demand.

- Evaluate the fire equipment reserve fund

- Continue to explore a railroad quiet zone.

- Support and encourage a body worn camera program within the police department.

- Obtain a primary ambulance transport agreement with the hospital.

- Staff will identify street funding options and the Council will hold at least one public meeting to discuss the options with the public.

- Evaluate and enhance Economic Development Plan

- Review current plans and strategies, reports, and goals

- Evaluate current program

- Explore areas for improvement

- Identify resources and hire a community developer.

- Increase the input of Baker City on the Economic Development Council. Implement an asset maintenance schedule

- Inventory needs

- Identify funding

- Prioritize needs

- Increase citizen involvement

- Greater use of Boards and Commissions

- Improve audio/visual system in Council Chambers

- Pursue ORMS for easy search of public records

- Maintain and Enhance water security

- Continue to make water security a priority through things like fuel reduction, fencing, fire breaks, and adequate funding.

- Establish a water rate structure that is not a burden on residents but that will provide adequate funding for future infrastructure needs.

- Make the communication of water rates and water projects a priority.

- Explore monthly water billing and E billing options

- Pursue an additional ground water source for safe drinking water

- Promote Government Integrity

- Encourage educational and training opportunities for staff and Council

- Improve audio/visual system in Council Chambers

- Promote a regional meeting with other Eastern Oregon Council members

- Get at least one report annually from all Baker City Boards and Commissions

- Promote Government integrity and professionalism

- Require cost effective budget management

- Evaluate all current contracts and MOUs for cost savings

- Identify efficiencies and seek areas for improvements

- Approve and oversee capital plans

- Require cost effective budgets.

- Explore options for third party ambulance billing to increase cost recovery.

## American Legion trudges onward



Todd Arriola / The Baker County Press

L-R: Jim Willis, Gene Hellickson Bill Bishop spoke to attendees at the Sunridge.

BY TODD ARRIOLA  
Todd@TheBakerCountyPress.com

A group of around 20 mustered at the Sunridge Inn Restaurant in Baker City on Thursday, April 7, 2016, at 6 p.m., for a pivotal monthly meeting, in order to decide what the ultimate fate of American Legion Post #41, which has seen an aging and declining membership, and financial issues, will be. The command decision: to keep the post alive.

Post #41 Commander Bill Bishop called the meeting to order, followed by prayer, the Pledge of Allegiance, the Preamble to the Constitution of the American Legion and Auxiliary, and roll call.

Among the attendees were Sons of the American Legion (SAL) Commander Curtis Calder, SAL National Executive Committee (NEC) Commander Willie Williams, State (Department) Commander Mike Jones, Department 1st Vice Chair Jim Willis, Department 2nd Vice Chair Gene Hellickson, Department Immediate Past Commander Andy Millar, Ken Anderson, Ike Brown, Terry McQuisten, Dave McQuisten, and Gamer Haven co-owner Josh Neilson.

Jones was introduced, and he first asked if everyone had received notification letters regarding the meeting, its purpose, and what else they may have heard, and how. The response was that not much was publicized, and Jones stated that he had hoped there would be more in attendance. The problems plaguing the post were chronicled in the Friday, April 17, 2015, and Friday, February 19, 2016 issues of *The Baker County Press*.

Jones asked Bishop whether he desired to remain Commander of the post, and Bishop replied that he was recruited to help reorganize the post, and to help improve it operationally, and that he has fulfilled that duty. He wishes to recruit another individual for the position, and he will assist how he can, but if the members decide they want him to remain as Commander, he will continue in that roll.

Jones pointed out one of the issues that needs to be remedied, in order for the post to be a viable entity: inactivity. He said that one or two American Legion programs could be implemented, and he provided some examples, among them, Boys State.

Boys State, founded in 1935, is an instruction program for students in high school, which allows participants to become actively involved in the operation of local, county, and state governments, according to the American Legion. It was created by Illinois Legionnaires Hayes Kennedy, and Harold Card, to counter the socialism-inspired Young Pioneer Camps. The American Legion Auxiliary sponsors a similar, but separate program, called Girls State. Both programs, along with Boys Nation, and Girls Nation, allow students to learn the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of franchised citizens.

Bishop emphasized the importance of the SAL, and that effort should also be expended to recruit more members, and Jones said that the SAL want the post to remain viable, too. Jones said there is a Post #41 building, but he pointed out that meetings are currently held at the Sunridge Inn, though, they should be held at the post. He said the post should be a place where younger veterans, and their wives, and children, can gather for meetings or events, as family unity is an important aspect that's a focus of the organization.

This prompted discussion of the topic of the post bar, which had been previously closed, due to financial and other issues. The financial issues, post bar, and loss in membership have been sources of tension, when discussed by post members.

Jones responded that he and the other officers are aware of those issues, and that the current members can reorganize the post's operation as they see fit. He said that there was damage done to the organization and operation of the post in the past, however, it's time to move on, and remedy those issues.

Hellickson was introduced, and he explained that, if members wish to sell the building (a possibility, pointed out previously to the membership), there needs to be a process, including motions made, regarding the sale, getting an appraisal, proceeding with the sale, etc. Neilson had expressed interest in possibly purchasing the building (Gamer Haven occupies part of the building), which would mean relocating the post to another building.