

Opinion / Local

— EDITORIAL —

Complaints hard to hear in the face of apathy

After the hiring of Fred Warner, Jr. as the new City Manager was announced, to the tune of \$98,000, the outcry across the community, at least as we've been experiencing it, has been roughly four to one against this decision. Part of Council itself was against it.

Maybe the choice of Warner, Jr. will turn out well and maybe it won't—he's starting out from a difficult place for certain. What bothers us right at this moment is the widespread apathy that preceded the outcry.

Members of the community have a voice in these decisions—a voice they seem to either choose not to use or don't realize they have to begin with.

While Council decisions are not put up to a vote of the general public—it would be impossibly cumbersome and expensive to do so—voters do choose the City Council members who represent them, whom they entrust to make these decisions as their elected representatives. This is why voting is so important. This is why it's so important for those who have strong

opinions regarding City Council decisions to consider running themselves.

In addition, citizens don't have to wait until a decision is made in order to voice an opinion. We can all provide feedback to Council members. Their contact information is always up on the Baker City web site.

We have been reporting on the hiring process for City Manager since its beginning. We printed here in the paper and posted on our Facebook feed updates at each step.

The public was aware of the backgrounds of the finalist candidates, including the fact that Warner, Jr. was among them.

Every City Council meeting has time set aside near the beginning for public comment. Residents of Baker City should utilize these opportunities to voice their thoughts and opinions. So rarely they do, though.

Citizens were invited to a public meet and greet to have one-on-one time with the three finalists for that position. At that meet and greet, City staff attended. The finalists attended. City Council attended. And a spouse of a finalist attended. But from the public? We saw only one individual—only one person from the general public—at that gathering.

Voters have the power here, folks, if only they knew it. We encourage people to exercise that power not only by voting, but by making their voices heard during important decisions whenever possible. We think it's hard to complain in a valid way if you've removed yourself from the process.

—The Baker County Press Editorial Board

— LETTERS TO THE EDITOR —

Albertsons still means grocery monopoly

To the Editor:

We are getting an Albertsons back! Well, whoopie doo! The Albertsons stores and the Safeway stores are owned by the same company.

What competition will that be in making the grocery bill any lower? Safeway has raised prices already. Will they reduce

the prices when the other store is operating? Yeah, right.

What we need is a Grocery Outlet and/or a Wal-Mart or some other grocery store that isn't owned by the same company as Safeway so we can get some good competition in prices. With Albertsons it is still going to be a monopoly on grocery prices.

Linda Foersterling
Baker City

City budget hearings take three evenings



Kerry McQuisten / The Baker County Press

Thirteen of the fourteen Budget Board members and a number of City staff and department heads gathered Monday night for the first of three meetings.

• VARIOUS GROUPS ASK FOR FUNDING FROM CITY

BY KERRY McQUISTEN

News@TheBakerCountyPress.com

Monday night the members of the Baker City Budget Board including City Council members, City Manager Mike Kee, and several department heads and members of staff gathered at 6 p.m. in the City Hall Council Chambers to begin the arduous week-long budget hearing process.

Following the Board's approval, the budget will be passed to Council for final adoption.

The first meeting lasted two and a half hours, and covered an introduction to the budget and the election of the Board's chair and vice chair: Jeff Petry and Gail Duman respectively.

The meeting was primarily devoted to public testimony.

Ron Rowen, Chair of the Baker County Fair Board was present. Rowen asked for \$4,400-\$5,000 from the City for sidewalk replacement. At present, the sidewalks located too close to the grandstands are creating water flow during rains, causing

damage to the grandstand pillars.

Mary Miller of the Public Arts Commission asked for a total of \$5,000 in their budget this year, up from \$2,000 in order to complete vinyl wraps and other projects.

Suzanne Fouty of the Molly Atwater Spay and Neuter Fund asked for \$2,000 to provide those services. She said 2,300 animals have been helped since 2005. 57% of those animals are within City Limits.

County Commission Chair Bill Harvey asked the City not to reduce its funding of 911 Consolidated Dispatch. The conversation between Harvey, Kee and others was somewhat confused minus specifics from the County budget, which Harvey said would be delivered for Wednesday's meeting.

Heidi Dalton spoke on behalf of the YMCA. David Blair spoke for the local firefighters' union Larry Abell spoke for Historic Baker City.

Wednesday's and Thursday's meetings went into more detail after this issue went to print, and address the topic of additional funding for the police and fire departments.

Copies of the 2016-2017 proposed budget are available to the public at City Hall upon request.

The Editor express the opinions of their authors, and have not been authored by and are not necessarily the opinions of The Baker County Press, any of our staff, management, independent contractors or affiliates. Advertisements placed by political groups, candidates, businesses, etc., are printed as a paid service, which does not constitute an endorsement of or fulfillment obligation by this newspaper for the products or services advertised.

City hires Fred Warner, Jr. as new City Manager

• SIX SEATS TO OPEN ON CITY COUNCIL, COUNCIL APPROVES \$55K IN HEAVY EQUIPMENT RENTALS

BY KERRY McQUISTEN

News@TheBakerCountyPress.com

All members of the Baker City Council were present Tuesday evening at 7 p.m. for a City Council meeting that began slowly with no citizen participation.

Facts and Figures.

Council then heard a presentation from Chris Rich, who serves as the regional economist for the Oregon State Employment Department.

Rich presented a range of statistics, primarily involving Baker, Union and Wallowa Counties. For example, 17,541 jobs exist in that area with six industries creating 70% of them. Union County holds 56.2% of that number, or 9,851 jobs. Baker County has 29.6% or 5,194 jobs. Wallowa County has 14% or 2,496 jobs.

The standardized employer category "education and health services" was the biggest category in the region with categories like "retail trade" and "local government" following.

According to Rich there are 2,079 firms in this tri-county group, with \$614,516,808 spent in total payroll and an average salary of \$35,035. 74% of the region's jobs are filled by those in the area, with the rest travelling in from outside. Meanwhile, 5,163 residents of the local area travel outside the area themselves for employment.

Baker County, said Rich, traditionally has more deaths than births, and only through a light influx of somewhat more than 200 individuals over a five-year span, has the area's population increased slightly. The retiree population is growing for Baker County, he said, with the trend of those in their 20s gravitating toward more urban areas also growing.

City Manager Contract.

Next up was the official vote to approve the contract for the new City Manager selected by Council during two interviews: Fred Warner, Jr.

Current City Manager Mike Kee stated that City Attorney Drew Martin had taken past and existing contracts for management staff, and updated them to reflect more current at-will language, etc., but that the contract for Warner remained very similar to what had been used in the past.

Warner is being offered \$98,000 per year for his new position.

Mayor Kim Mosier stated that Warner would have "challenges in a community that already knows him." She added that she felt Council had interviewed three "very qualified" individuals over "two in-depth meetings" and that "Fred has qualifications that put him above the others."

Mosier went on to outline those qualities, which she said boiled down to Warner being the only candidate who had lived in Oregon; he has experience working in rural areas; and he has working knowledge of where to find grants for which to apply.

Councilor Sandy Lewis moved to adopt the contract. Councilor Rosemary Abell seconded that motion. Lewis, Abell, Mosier, Langrell and Thomas voted in favor of the contract. Councilors Lowe and Downing voted in opposition.

Warner will begin his contract June 1.

Third-Party Ambulance Billing.

City Finance Director Jeanie Dexter led a discussion to adopt a third-party billing service for ambulance invoicing, thereby outsourcing the billing and collection away from City Hall. The idea was initiated by Baker City Fire Chief Mark John and Lt. Don Taggart who brought their research to Dexter.

In weeks prior, Dexter looked primarily at two companies: Emergency Revenue Resources and EMS Billing Services. She determined that the differences between the two companies were "night and day," and that the former was far superior to the latter in terms of knowledge and customer service. Thus, Council voted to retain Emergency Revenue Resources starting in June.

As a conservative estimate, the decision to outsource should bring with it a 30% increase in revenue, or approximately \$200,000 per year, according to Dexter.

Fire Department Update.

Chief John gave an update to the Council about activities and successes within his department over the past six or so months. John mentioned he'll be able, for the first time in his career, to attend the National Fire Academy. That academy will last about a week this August.

He spoke to the success of the fire prevention safety inspections his department has done—100 total anticipated in 2016 out of the 400 commercial occupancies in Baker City. John said his staff had found "life safety" issues in many and have been able to work toward correcting them.

John also spoke to the County in hopes of securing an agreement specifying the City as their designated emergency provider for ambulance services. A county must specify a provider per state statute, and competitors are expressing interest.

Equipment Rental.

Council voted unanimously to approve \$50-\$55K, contingent upon 2016-2017 budget approval, to go for the rental of two excavators (first a smaller, then eventually a larger) and crusher bucket this fall to continue work between Little Mill and Big Mill on the water transmission line.

At the conclusion of the meeting, recorder Julie Smith mentioned that six Council positions will be coming open, with filing opening June 1 and closing August 30. Those in attendance wished outgoing City Manager Kee a fond farewell.

— CONTACT US —

The Baker County Press

PO Box 567
Baker City, Ore. 97814

Open Monday-Thursday for calls
9 AM - 4 PM

Open 24/7 for emails

Phone: 541.519.0572

TheBakerCountyPress.com

Kerry McQuisten, Publisher
Editor@TheBakerCountyPress.com

Wendee Morrissey, Advertising and Sales
Wendee@TheBakerCountyPress.com

David Conn, Advertising and Sales
David@TheBakerCountyPress.com

Published weekly every Friday.
Subscription rates per year are \$29.95 all areas,
e-mail delivery. \$39.95 print issue, home delivery,
Baker City city limits only. \$49.95 print issue,
mail delivery, outside Baker City city limits only.
Payment in advance.

A division of
Black Lyon Publishing, LLC

Copyright © 2014 -2016

YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

President Barack Obama

202.456.1414

202.456.2461 fax

Whitehouse.gov/contact

US Sen. Jeff Merkley

503.326.3386

503.326.2900 fax

Merkley.Senate.gov

US Sen. Ron Wyden

541.962.7691

Wyden.Senate.gov

US Rep. Greg Walden

541.624.2400

541.624.2402 fax

Walden.House.gov

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown

503.378.3111

Governor.Oregon.gov

State Rep. Cliff Bentz

503.986.1460

State Sen. Ted Ferrioli

541.490.6528

Baker County Commissioners Bill Harvey; Mark Bennett; Tim Kerns

541.523.8200

541.523.8201

Letter to the Editor Policy: The Baker County Press reserves the right not to publish letters containing factual falsehoods or incoherent narrative. Letters promoting or detracting from specific for-profit businesses will not be published. Word limit is 375 words per letter. Letters are limited to one every other week per author. Letters should be submitted to Editor@TheBakerCountyPress.com.

Advertising and Opinion Page Disclaimer:
Opinions submitted as Guest Opinions or Letters to