

# Local

## City Council hears econ development updates

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Tuesday night's Council meeting began with Mayor Mosier calling the meeting to order and leading the pledge of allegiance and a brief invocation. City Recorder Julie Smith called roll, all councilors answered present.

Council turned to the consent agenda that consisted of minutes from the September 13th Council meeting and a request for a liquor license allowing for "Off Premises" sales by Safeway Inc. in the Albertsons' building located at 1120 Campbell Street.

In a report prepared by Police Chief Wyn Lohner, it was noted the location previously allowed sales while operating as Albertsons and Haggen, and he saw no reason not to approve the request.

With no changes noted Councilor Downing made a motion to approve with a second heard by Councilor Lowe. A unanimous vote followed. Mayor Mosier called for citizen participation, of which there was none.

### Economic Development Update

The City of Baker City contracts, together with Baker County, with Greg Smith for economic development services.

Smith, accompanied by two of his staff members, addressed Council.

Smith began by congratulating Nudd on her new position with the City. He also acknowledged a "great ribbon-cutting with Albertsons."

Smith did mention that he was not at that ribbon-cutting because he was working with a potential third grocer possibly interested in locating to Baker City.

Smith did not hint as to whom that grocer was but did indicate they were a type of specialty store.

In his update, he noted that this summer had been a really good tourism season according to local lodging partners he'd spoken with and they'd indicated their numbers are remaining good so far through September.

He advised Council that the gas station, convenience store and hotel at Farewell Bend will be seeing construction projects and reopening, but however did not provide an estimated timeline for that to happen.

Although Farewell Bend is actually in Malheur County, for which Smith also serves as Economic Development Director, Smith said, "It is of importance and impact to Huntington and Baker City—" due to its location.

Smith noted that Work source Oregon currently had 60 jobs open in the area.

He said, "And these are not just entry level posi-

tions they are family wage jobs, so we are seeing that there are job opportunities within the City and the County. One of the things we are hearing is that it is a challenge trying to find folks to fill those positions."

Smith noted that in the realm of economic development he recognized the importance of providing support to already established businesses as well as attracting new businesses.

He spoke of bringing local business owners together approximately every 45-60 days.

In these gatherings, businesses are able to discuss ways that Smith can help these businesses grow.

Smith says that in recent meetings he has been hearing that "there is a real need for workforce development. The jobs are there they just can't find the right employee."

In an effort to meet this challenge, County Commission Chair Bill Harvey took the lead and with Smith is bringing together entities from throughout the region such as Work Source Oregon, BTI, The Chamber, Economic Development, BMCC, DHS, SMBC to name but a few in an effort to assist local business owners with an organized summit called Building a Better Business. The summit will be held November 1st at the Baker County Event Center.

In a recent survey conducted among local businesses Smith asked questions pertaining to hiring, he found that 79% of the 57 responses he received back had hired an employee in the last twelve months and 66% said they anticipated hiring an employee in the next twelve months.

According to Smith businesses expressed reasons for not hiring as varying from employees struggling with many different issues including technical skills, work ethic, and communication among the most common.

The summit will have a session on hiring and retaining employees.

Smith then moved on to an exciting new opportunity that could potentially help with a large concern in Baker County; cleaning up the dead and dying timber in our forests and particularly our watershed that currently pose a great fire danger.

At the request of commissioners, Smith began looking into options to assist with addressing options to remedy this problem.

At a meeting with Portland General Electric, Smith was asked if he knew what was happening at the coal fire plant in Boardman.

He listened closely with the understanding that the Oregon Legislature has said that energy sources will have to become 50%

renewable sources within the next 20 or 30 years.

PGE will have to switch their coal fire plant to another energy source by 2020.

Smith heard loud and clear that PGE is looking into using torrefied wood.

Torrefaction is a 100% natural process that leaves wood stable and durable. The Vikings used this method to enhance the resistance and durability of wood.

First, the wood is gradually heated to approximately 130° for about 20 hours. This process equalizes the material and lowers the moisture level to almost 0%.

The wood then undergoes an intense heat treatment where the wood is heated to about 200° to thermally modify its molecular structure.

The wood is much less subject to fluctuations in moisture levels, giving it unmatched stability and durability.

The wood has much greater resistance to decay and insects. The temperature is then gradually lowered. During this phase, the controlled addition of water vapor brings the moisture level of the wood back to 4% to 7% making the wood much like charcoal. Smith sees this as an opportunity for Baker County to get on the front end of the movement creating jobs and economic security in the area.

Smith estimates over 100 million tons of torrefied wood would be needed annually and obviously Baker County can't provide all of that, it would be sourced from all over leading Smith to point out the possibility of Baker City being a rail hub to transport the product to Boardman, adding another element to the positive economic impact.

He told Council that this opportunity would continue to be explored and as he learned more he would be advising them on the matter.

### Community Development Update

Robin Nudd, recently hired to serve roles as the community developer and as City Manager Fred Warner Jr.'s management assistant, briefly addressed Council.

Warner introduced her to Council saying, "Today is only her ninth day on the job, but she has hit the ground running."

Nudd advised Council of a small array of projects she has begun working on including working with Baker High School on Brownfield projects, which are properties that are identified as real property that has been identified as being able to redevelop or reuse but may be contaminated by actual or perceived environmental contaminations, for example; mold.

The school has been in-



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Greg Smith gives updates on his office's activities to the City Council.

involved with these projects for several years, most notably the Ostwald site.

Grants from the US EPA, DEQ and NEOEDD helped to fund the cleanup of the site. Other projects mentioned were working with BC Vibe and Main Street projects.

Nudd advised she would be meeting with HBC very soon to discuss collaborations.

Nudd also is planning a meeting with businesses on 10th Street in an effort to reenergize the improvement project planned for that area.

Nudd also said she would like to add a page on the City's website specifically geared toward community development.

### Third Reading of Ordinance # 3350 Charter Franchise Agreement; Amending Ordinance # 3349

A third reading of this ordinance, in its entirety was passed upon a unanimous vote of the council. This ordinance simply corrects language in the previously adopted ordinance. It will not change the ordinance in any way.

### Vehicle Purchase Authorization

The 2016-2017 adopted budget allocated dollars for the purchase of two pick-up trucks, replacing two pick-up's the City already owns and the acquisition of an additional mid-sized SUV for use by the building department. Those allocated funds, \$30,000 for one crew cab pick-up, \$28,000 for one extended cab pick-up and \$28,000 for one SUV were budgeted for in the equipment and vehicle fund and building funds respectively.

Michelle Owen advised council that bids were solicited for the vehicles with four separate bids being received.

After clarifying that none of the bids met all of the specifications entirely, City employees directly

impacted by the purchase and use of these vehicles reviewed the submissions and selected what they felt would be the best options.

Those that were chosen were also the lowest cost bids.

Owen explained that the lowest bid for the crew cab pick-up was from Tonkin Nissan, out of the Portland area, for a 2017 Nissan Frontier at a cost of \$26,442.

Owen advised Council that Tonkin had contacted her after the RFPs were all received and the close date to submit had passed to inform her that they had a year end 2016 model available they could offer at roughly \$500 less than the 2017 they had submitted a bid for.

Owen stated she did not feel it was entirely fair to consider the 2016 model as it was received after the close date and was not included in the official bid.

Councilor Joseph stated that he did not feel a \$500 discount was enough for a year older vehicle, Council agreed with the exception of Councilor Lowe who felt perhaps an even larger discount could be offered for the 2016 model with further negotiations. Mayor Mosier and Owen both agreed that unfortunately that was not how the "bid" system worked it was different from the way one would buy a personal vehicle.

The lowest bid for the extended cab pick-up was from Gentry Auto Group for a 2017 Ford F-150 extended cab for \$25,023.28 and the SUV came back with a lowest bid from Baker Garage for a Chevrolet Traverse at \$26,571.

All Vehicles were under the budgeted amount.

Councilor Downing moved to approve the purchase of all three recommended vehicles with a second by Councilor Thomas.

All Councilors voted in favor with the exception of Councilor Lowe. The mo-

tion carried.

### City Manager/Director Comments

Fred Warner Jr. advised Council he had finalized the contract for the Golf Course but not in time to get it in front of Council for a vote and was working to finalize the 911 dispatch contract.

The 911 agreement will go to the County Commissioners, since the City contracts with the County for those services. Once approved by the Commissioners the Council should expect to see it in plenty of time to review before voting on its approval.

He also mentioned a meeting with the DEQ and that it is time to begin looking at options for improving to the wastewater system, which has become critical.

He also mentioned that he had been made aware of improvements needing to be made on Main Street concerning wheelchair access, that there was not the ability to navigate easily from one side of the street to the other. Michelle Owen addressed Council that the improvements and upgrades to Sam-O Swim Center were very near completion. All projects went well and they are on schedule to reopen on Monday October 3.

### Council Comments

Councilor Abell mentioned the Taste of Baker being held October 8, 2016, which will feature 24 vendors.

Tokens will begin being sold at 2 p.m. that day outside of Charley's Deli, US Bank, Earth and Vine, Glacier 45 and the Little Bagel Shop.

Councilor Thomas reminded everyone that the Cast Iron Chef Cook-off will also be held October 8, 2016 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center.

With nothing further Mayor Mosier adjourned the meeting.

## Drugs

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At present, Baker County and the City of Baker do not allow recreational marijuana dispensaries, however; the City of Huntington does and the subject is currently up in

the air in both Halfway and Sumpter.

At present, Huntington has one established dispensary with a potential second in the works, and an enormous grow site. A stream of traffic with Idaho license plates has become common in Huntington.

Unity has at least two grow sites, said Ash. "Marijuana is still a drug to me," said Ash. He said

he can put his personal opinions on the matter aside, however, and work with growers and dispensaries. "It's legal," he said with a shrug.

Spencer gave a range of statistics to the room. "There are 194 registered medical marijuana users in Baker County," he said. In Union County there are 335, and 475 in Malheur County. Statewide there

are 66,880.

29,832 registered "caregivers" or medical marijuana growers are registered in Oregon.

In Oregon, said Spencer, 85% of the applicants for medical marijuana cards are white males age 21-28 claiming chronic pain.

Spencer pointed out that in Colorado, where he just visited to receive additional training, burn

center visits related to butane explosions due to marijuana-related activities are up 120% since legalization there, and also attributes at least some of that state's 20% rise in welfare recipients since that time to legalized marijuana.

Several audience members whispered agreement while others voiced disagreement, and pointed out the tax benefits of legaliz-

ing the drug.

Spencer tried to bring the discussion back around to physical signs of consumption, and the chemical makeup of marijuana.

Spencer spoke to increasing levels of THC—the chemical component in the buds that makes people "high"—and how it differs from much lower levels in decades past.

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