

Local

Bentz speaks to City Council

• CITY TO GET NEW STREET SWEEPER

BY GINA K. SWARTZ
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An executive session began the evening Tuesday in Council Chambers at 6:30 p.m. as the majority of Council convened to discuss real estate matters.

The Regular Council session was opened by Mayor Mosier shortly after the designated seven o'clock hour with Council in its entirety present.

Councilor Lowe led the Pledge of Alliance and gave the invocation saying, "I don't like to ask for things in prayer but give thanks." His invocation gave thanks to the beauty of autumn, noting all the beauty around our City this time of year. Mayor Mosier called for citizen participation. With no one coming forward Council turned then to the Agenda.

Rep. Cliff Bentz

State Representative Cliff Bentz, District 60, addressed Council concerning transportation. He advised that work toward a transportation bill was put on hold as the legislators waited to see if ballot measure 97 passed.

Representative Bentz said, "For the record, I'm opposed to 97." He did note, "If passed, this measure would allocate about 500 million to roads." That of course would not be all at once.

He gave a PowerPoint presentation outlining some very real statistics.

Bentz indicated the power point presentation would be available online within a week. The point of the presentation was to inform Council and Citizens that Oregon roads are in severe despair and urgent immediate attention is necessary.

Bentz stated that it is a very real possibility many roads are "going to return to gravel" because funds to repair them are simply not available. He noted that the gas tax currently in place provided very little toward road repair. The same is the case for registration and title transfer fees the DMV collects that in part fund roads. The Legislation, when it reconvenes, will be working on putting together a transportation bill.

Bentz wants to get the word out to as many City Councils and groups of citizens as he can so that he can address the legislature with the people's voice. "I want to know, what do you want me to say?"

Bentz went on to show recent pictures of roads in towns such as Vale, Nyssa, Ontario and even a highway outside of Juntura all of which looked like they could've been roads in a recently bombed third world country.

Although Baker City does have some areas of concern Bentz noted that our Public Works did an excellent job with our City streets, however we were above normal and said, "You folks are very lucky."

Bentz, in an effort to make understood the gravity of the situation told Council that if our roads are untravellable we are not going to be able to get exported goods out of the state resulting in huge revenue losses.



State Rep. Cliff Bentz addresses City Council.

He is proposing transportation Hubs (he showed a picture of a hub located in Tri-Cities) that would truck local product in and that product would be loaded on to train cars and transported by rail to wherever it needed to go, thus saving some wear on our roads and keeping revenue intact.

The presentation that shows statistics of road conditions throughout the State, roads most at risk and breakdowns of gas tax, title transfer and registration revenue should be available soon on Bentz's webpage. He is urging all citizens to access as much information as they can about revenues, road conditions and solutions and call him so that your voice is heard. Call Representative Bentz at 503-986-1460 He also has a Facebook page.

SAIF Corporation 100th Year Member Anniversary Recognition

Fred Payton, eastern region supervisor and Michelle Graham, Vice President of Policy Holder Services from the SAIF Corporation, the city's worker's compensation insurance provider awarded the City with a beautiful special made myrtle wood plaque, crafted in the shape of the state of Oregon, to recognize that Baker City has been a member for 100 years.

SAIF contracted with one of their insured from Rouge Valley to manufacture the unique piece. According to Graham myrtle wood represents strength and uniqueness due to the fact that when cut each piece has its own pattern.

"This is a big deal to SAIF," Graham said. Graham acknowledged the partnership began in May 1916 when worker's compensation insurance was not mandatory. "For your City Councilors to recognize the importance of keeping your workers safe (When worker's compensation was voluntary) is pretty outstanding." Said Graham. The City of Baker City recognized the importance of protecting its workers and has been a continuous policy holder since.

Graham told Council that Baker City is one of only two policy holders in the State that holds such an amazing title. The other? Bend. "Having two customers that have maintained coverage with us for 100 years is almost unheard of."

She said and went on to recognize that having both of those customers be on the East side of the State was "Pretty Cool."

Central Park Labyrinth

Aletha Bonebrake addressed Council regarding placing a labyrinth along the Leo Adler Parkway near Valley Ave. She advised that this project

would be an asset to the City and enhance both Central Park and the Pathway.

She told council that a meditation garden had been envisioned by the Parks and Recreation Board in the same area and in her opinion the labyrinth would complement that garden. She advised that an anonymous donor has pledged \$25,000 toward the project and the Lion's club was on board to help fund raise the remainder of the money needed to complete the project. City involvement would require only preparing the ground which Public Works Director Michelle Owen stated they could do with very little cost to the City.

Bonebrake acknowledged that once completed it would be a City asset however although still in the development phase she assured that the maintenance would be minimal and the site that has been chosen would not interfere with sprinkler system already in place.

Bonebrake cited Boise and The Dalles as having already installed labyrinths in their cities and they have been well received. She presented a short video explaining how Hospitals, Mental Health Facilities and even prisons have been utilizing labyrinths for some time as means for calming effects.

The labyrinth is installed flat into the ground and is ADA accessible. A kit would be purchased and then installed. Bonebrake emphasized the intent to complete the project prior to the August 2017 Solar eclipse in which Baker City is within the prime viewing area.

Bonebrake feels that by having this unique feature in place in our community at that time would only add interest for those here to witness the eclipse. Councilor Lowe moved to approve the project with a second by Councilor Downing. Council voted unanimously in support.

Performing Main Street

City Manager Warner advised Council that newly hired Community Development Coordinator Robin Nudd had been talking with the downtown business owners about the possibility of making our City a designated Performing Main Street as it once was in the 1990'S until 2010. Baker City was not only a Performing Main Street participant but was nationally recognized as having a premier program.

After some public hearings and concerns over transparency and accountability the program unraveled and Historic Baker City has since been run solely by volunteers. With a number of new businesses and a Community Development Coordinator

on staff the timing to revitalize our downtown core seems appropriate.

Beverly Calder, long-time downtown business owner of Bella addressed Council saying, "I can't tell you how thrilling it is to have City Council talking about HBC. We were the poster child for the state of Oregon, we had one of the best Main Street Programs in the Country. We were recognized by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. There was over a million dollars that came into this historic district because of that."

Warner said Nudd has been working with different programs and is very excited to put flame to this project. "We're just wanting to make sure the Council is on board as we go forward," Warner stated. Council agreed unanimously to direct staff, to work with HBC and businesses toward the goal of becoming a viable Performing Main Street Program.

Street Sweeper

The 2016 Budget allows for the purchase of a new street sweeper. Public Works Director gave a run down of the street sweeper she was requesting authorization of funds to purchase. Sweepers are on a schedule to be replaced every seven years, Baker City however has not replaced their sweeper since 2004.

The proposed sweeper is an Elgin Crosswind. This sweeper is the recommendation of the Public Works Committee and was chosen as their recommendation at their Oct 18, 2016 meeting. The cost for the Elgin Crosswind is \$253,415 under the budgeted \$255,000. Councilor Joseph motioned to approve the purchase with a second by Councilor Downing. A unanimous vote was cast.

Comments

City Manager Warner advised Council that Baker Fire Chief Mark John had resigned. He indicated John would remain on the job until mid-November. Warner advised Council the job opening had been posted in-house and it was his understanding that there was already interest in the position by some currently on staff. He also stated that he was posting the opening on the City website. Close date for applications will be November 7, 2016.

He also advised Council that La Grande had recently hired a new Fire Chief and one of the candidates for that job had expressed interest in Baker City.

He told Council he was negotiating with the police on a new contract, was still in talks with the YMCA and is waiting on DEQ regarding the MOU.

Fire Chief Mark John resigns

BY GINA K. SWARTZ
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Just shy of reaching a two-year milestone with Baker City as Fire Chief, Mark John has submitted his resignation for an opportunity in Spokane, Washington.

John moved to Baker City from the Anaheim, California area.

"For myself and my family, it's something that we just can't pass up, but it was a very difficult decision," he said.

Around the third week of November is when John is expecting to sever his ties with the Baker City Fire Department.

He said, "Baker City has been a great opportunity for us, both for my family and myself professionally."

John reflects on his time in Baker City fondly saying, "I've had such a good experience here. People have been incredibly gracious and accepting. The Department has been very receptive to changes that we've made in efforts to improve our capabilities and services. It's just been a fantastic experience for me here."

John noted several improvements the department has made but does not take full responsibility for anything.

He credits his staff, and said, "They are really the ones that make those things happen. I think we've improved services overall and we've increased staffing recently which has had a very significant impact on our ability to respond to calls and provide the vital services of the department, I think the community has certainly benefited from those things."

John spoke of the extremely successful smoke alarm program that the Department has embarked on over the last two years. John feels that the program has notably added a layer of safety to the community that was not there previously.

"We've already installed over 400 smoke alarms and we just made arrangements to acquire another 100, so before the end of the year our department will have installed 500 plus smoke alarms in the community within a year to 14 months. It's really pretty amazing," he explained.

He said another of the accomplishments he's been a part of while leading Baker Fire Department is the addition last year of a Brush Engine to their fleet. John said it was "a component that the department didn't previously have."

He also noted that they have entered several interagency agreements that enhance services to the community as well. For example, there is currently an arrangement with Richland/Halfway ambulance service that provides an ambulance on loan free of charge, providing equipment that allows Baker Fire to better serve the community.

John also cited an automatic aid agreement entered with Baker Rural Fire Department and said that they are looking to having more of those agreements in place with our neighbors to provide the "best possible service to our community."

He also mentioned, "Our fire safety inspection program in the community, it just adds to the services we provide and creates a safer place."

Overall John said he feels that there are so many things that have been collectively done and says he doesn't feel that any one achievement made is any better than the others.

He says that he is most proud of the way the department personnel has responded to the suggestions and changes that he has recommended.

He said, "I really give credit to the staff for following through and carrying those things out."

As far as any one particular moment or event that resonates with him, John declined to specify just one saying, "I've truly enjoyed every moment I've been here. I guess the things that really stand out are when I first learned I was coming, I was thrilled, and as I am departing I have mixed emotions because I've just really enjoyed what I've experienced here."

He continued by adding, "There is always a balance to be struck with the pace that you establish. Especially coming from the outside, I tried to be very cognizant of that so as not to change things too quickly because you always have different personalities, there's a group that would like to move very quickly and there's a group that would like to move at a more moderate pace."

"That's the balance that needs to be struck as a leader and a manager, identifying what that looks like and what's the healthiest pace for the organization. I would hope that I've provided some strong leadership and I hope I've been a good example for them."

John was not sure if the next Fire Chief would be someone promoted from within or if the City would be conducting a wide-reaching search, but thought the matter would be discussed at the City Council meeting held October 25, 2016.



Submitted Photo.

Fire Chief Mark John.

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