

Local

County Commissioners: Various board members appointed



Todd Arriola/ The Baker County Press

The new team of County Commissioners: Mark Bennett, Bill Harvey (Chair), and Bruce Nichols.

BY TODD ARRIOLA
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The Baker County Board of Commissioners held its first session of 2017, on Wednesday, January 4, 9 a.m., in the Commission Chambers of the Baker County Courthouse. Commission Chair Bill Harvey and Commissioner Mark Bennett were joined by Commissioner Bruce Nichols, who was elected to that position in November, replacing retiring Commissioner Tim Kerns.

Attendance also included Baker County Administrative Services Coordinator Christena Cook, Baker County Sheriff Travis Ash, Baker County Facilities Maintenance Foreman Dan McQuisten, Baker County Assessor Kerry Savage, Tork and Wanda Ballard, John Creighton, and Peter Hall.

The meeting was called to order, and the Invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance were recited, both led by Harvey. The agenda was then adopted, with the noted addition of a mineral withdrawal discussion to be held later in the session, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols.

There were no comments offered for Citizen Participation.

The minutes from the Wednesday, December 21, 2016 session were approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Harvey.

The Board discussed the County budget, and Bennett said that a two-year revenue projection needs to be developed, due to a major State shortfall, reducing funding to the County. He said that Secure Rural Schools (SRS) funding is “dead,” and that Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) and Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) funding have taken major hits, in the 70-100% range, and the 30-60% range, respectively.

Cook said that she’s had

a great working relationship with County department heads (she’s been in her position for 15 years, she said), and she explained the budget process. Bennett asked Nichols, whose professional experience has primarily been in the area of accounting (Nichols & Mitchell CPA PC, of Baker City), and Cook to develop some sort of general budget road map, to discuss at the next Commission work session, which is scheduled for next Wednesday, January 11, 9 a.m. Nichols said that he’d like to speak with each department head regarding the topic.

Order No. 2017-101, Appointing A Budget Officer For Baker County, was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols. Harvey was appointed, his term set as the 2017-2018 fiscal year (July 1, 2017, through June 30, 2018).

Order No. 2017-102, Re-Appointing A Member To The Baker County Budget Board, was approved, with a motion from Harvey, and a second from Bennett. Jim Bruce was re-appointed, his term set to expire on January 1, 2020.

Order No. 2017-103, Re-Appointing A Member To The Northeast Oregon Economic Development District Budget Board, was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols. Robert Savage was re-appointed, his term set to expire on December 31, 2019.

Order No. 2017-104, Re-Appointing Members To The Baker County Museum Commission, was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols. Dave Hunsaker and Kurt Miller were re-appointed, their terms set to expire on January 1, 2020.

Order No. 2017-105, Re-Appointing Members To The Baker Valley Vector Control Board, was approved, with a motion

from Nichols, and a second from Bennett. Ralph Morgan, Rex Nelson, and Martha Jane Spratling were re-appointed, their terms set to expire on December 31, 2019.

Order No. 2017-106, Re-Appointing A Member To The Western Heights Special Road District Board, was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Harvey. Cliff Schoeningh was re-appointed, his term set to expire on December 31, 2019. Prior to the motion, Nichols mentioned that his firm has performed accounting work for Western Heights, in the interest of mentioning a potential conflict of interest, however, there was no noted conflict currently.

Order No. 2017-107, An Order Directing The Baker County Sheriff To Make Sale Of County Property; Fixing The Minimum Price And Providing A Portion Of The Conditions And Terms Of Sale, was approved, with a minimum bid of \$15,000, with a motion from Harvey, and a second from Bennett. The following is to be sold as one lot, under Reference No. 9411: Reference No. 9410, a 25.7 x 100 bare lot, in Huntington, with land valued at \$3,300, and structure at \$0, for a total of \$3,300 real market value, with back taxes in the amount of \$531.72, and estimated expenses at \$450, for a total of \$981.72; and Reference No. 9411, at 90 West Washington Street, in Huntington, with land valued at \$8,100, and structure at \$2,140, for a total of \$10,240 real market value, with back taxes in the amount of \$1,830.59, and estimated expenses at \$921.88, for a total of \$2,752.47.

Harvey asked Bennett to provide an update regarding the status of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and United States Forest Service (USFS)-spearheaded mineral

withdrawal, a proposal that would include prohibiting the entry and location of new mining claims, throughout 10 million acres of public and National Forest System lands located in Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming. This action, a withdrawal which would be exercised by Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell, is the result of Sagebrush Focal Areas identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), as areas where disturbance and fragmentation of sage-grouse habitat is caused by certain hardrock mining operations.

Bennett said that the County has avoided, so far, becoming a part of the withdrawal, though he’s unsure whether the County can be given full credit for that. He said that the County isn’t directly involved with the withdrawal, but there is support given to neighboring counties, and the County is preparing itself for any potential affects. Bennett said that he’s not certain what comments should be provided in protest to the withdrawal yet (documentation associated with the withdrawal is needed first, and the Final Environmental Impact Statement hasn’t been released yet), but he and Harvey said that informing the County’s Natural Resource Advisory Committee (NRAC), and seeking its input first, would be a good idea. The next NRAC meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 24, 3 p.m., in the Commission Chambers.

Prior to adjournment, Harvey welcomed Nichols to his role as Commissioner, and to his first session. A Commission work session is scheduled for next Wednesday, January 11, 9 a.m., including further discussion of the County’s budget, and of the County/City 911 dispatch agreement.

Ski coach to travel to Austria

BY SAMANTHA O’CONNOR
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Local Ski Coach Bryan Tweit will be one of the coaches to travel to Austria for the 2017 Special Olympics in March. Tweit has been coaching Special Olympics for 25 years and he will be coaching the advanced skiers for this year’s games.

Tweit and the athletes who will be going to Austria met in Killington, Vermont for training and preparing for the Special Olympics. Tweit explained that, in order to go to Killington, every athlete has to have a gold medal in the previous year’s state games. Tweit runs the State Games for the state of Oregon and runs the downhill portion of the State Games on Mount Bachelor.

“Both of our athletes had gold medals,” Tweit explained. “Then the local area directors have nominated them to the state level. The state level then vets those out, and sends them to the US National Team, and the US National Team then vets those athletes out and decides which ones will be invited to be on the US National Team. And then the coaches actually have to go through a little more rigorous process because you’re responsible for other people’s lives.”

Coaches go through multiple interview processes and background checks. There will be eight in the group from Oregon going to Austria; five athletes and three coaches. The total going from the US is 210, including coaches, athletes, and support staff.

After going through training and prepping in Killington, Tweit, the other coaches, and the athletes went to New York. There, Castleton University hosted a dinner for the Special Olympics.

“It was pretty phenomenal getting off the plane and having tons of people lined up with signs and clapping because we all had our USA gear on and USA team gear and news cameras there and photographers. It was pretty amazing,” said Tweit. “It’s hard to put into words. It was pretty emotional, more so for the coaches, I think the athletes were just kind of taking it all in.”

He explained that Killington is a dry run for the World Games in Austria.

There are no parents or family, only the coaches, athletes, support staff, and the press.

Tweit explained that the dry run is to help athletes prepare for the experiences the athletes will have in Austria.

The time in Killington is also to see if they can handle being in that environment, with other athletes they have never met.

“We go through a transition,” said Tweit. “When we flew out of Portland we were basically in ‘State Mode,’ I was responsible for all of the state athletes. As soon as we arrived in New York, that switched, I was no longer responsible for those athletes and people. Their coaches were more responsible for them and I was responsible for the downhill skiers, the ones I have are the advanced group of kids.”

Tweit explained that this process is important for the athletes to become used to being around their coaches and fellow athletes as they will be in different venues all over Austria. They will go to Graz, then to Schladming, where the opening ceremony will be held, and they will be spread out depending on what they are doing.

On the last night they will be in Austria, they will go back to State Mode for returning home.

Library book sale needs volunteers

Friends of Baker County Library are looking for volunteers to help with their winter book sale January 26 through February 5.

Volunteers are needed to help sort books on Jan. 26, work as cashiers on January 27 - 29, and February 4, and to pack up books on February 5.

Each volunteer earns a \$20 gift certificate to use at the book sale, or in the Library Book Shop. Volunteers can sign up at the Library, or call 541-523-6596.

YHEC 2017 registration open

Youth Hunter Education Challenge 2017 Registration Thursday January 12 at the Powder River Sportsmen’s Clubhouse at 2690 Broadway. \$25.

YHEC is an Educational Training program that teaches kids age 10-18 valuable skills in eight hunting-related disciplines: Archery, .22 Rifle and Muzzleloader Rifle accuracy, Sporting Clays, Orienteering, Safety Afield, Wildlife ID, and Hunting Knowledge & Ethics.

The program spans five months, with weekly meetings on Thursdays at 5:30 p.m. at the PRSC Clubhouse.

Participants statewide compete in a June Challenge to select five Junior and five Senior team members who travel all-expenses-paid to represent Oregon at the National YHEC event held each year in Pennsylvania or New Mexico.

We gladly lend archery equipment, muzzleloaders, .22 rifles, 20g shotguns, and orienteering compasses to kids who don’t yet have their own.

Record-breaking cold spell continues

On Thursday morning, the temperature recorded at the Baker City Airport was -24 degrees, shattering the previous record of -22F on this day, which was set in 1950 according to The National Weather Service.

These temperatures continue a cold trend that began nearly a month ago back in December.

The cold froze and broke pipes at the North Powder School, cancelling school both before and after

Christmas break while repairs are being made.

Parents dropping their little ones off at Brooklyn elementary are encouraged to bring them through the school building rather than the playground, as classes

line up inside the gym rather than on the playground.

The cold is expected to continue off and on throughout the next week, so leaving water dripping at night is advised.