

Local

County hears about drug addiction, declares state of emergency due to severe weather

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The Baker County Board of Commissioners held a regular session on Wednesday, January 18, 2017, 9 a.m., in the Commission Chambers of the Baker County Courthouse, which included public comment from Steve Culley, a Veterans Services departmental update from Rick Gloria, a City/County 911 Consolidated Dispatch agreement discussion, a City of Unity supplemental budget discussion, and a Declaration Of Local Disaster, due to winter conditions.

Present from the Board were Chair Bill Harvey, Commissioners Mark Bennett and Bruce Nichols, and Shelly Christensen from Payroll, sitting in for Executive Assistant Heidi Martin.

Attendance also included Baker County 911 Consolidated Dispatch Center Director Hope Lindsey, Baker County Sheriff Travis Ash, Baker County Emergency Manager Jason Yencopal, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Supervisor Tom Montoya, John Creighton, Tork and Wanda Ballard, Bobbie Danser, and Chuck Chase.

The meeting was called to order, followed by the Invocation, and the Pledge of Allegiance, both led by Harvey. The agenda was adopted, with no noted changes, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols.

Citizen Participation included Culley, who first said that his son, Ryan, would have been 38 years old the day of the session, and his discussion was in honor of him (Ryan had committed suicide, as a result of drug addiction, Culley said). Culley expressed confusion as to why the revenue from the tax of marijuana sales is not going towards the treatment of drug addiction, he wants the County to be more vocal, and he wishes to get a clear message to the State Legislature, about the issues with drugs, and with the failures with drug treatment programs, in general.

Harvey said that part of the problem is that cities (such as Huntington and Sumpter, but not Baker City) approved a tax on marijuana sales, as a source of revenue, rather than on the treatment of drugs, or for the enforcement of drug laws, which is why he said the tax was approved.

Culley said he experienced issues with attempting to speak to Governor Kate Brown about the topic, and Nichols, while stat-

ing that the County could write letters and speak on Culley's behalf, he suggested contacting organizations such as New Directions Northwest, which he said has some considerable political clout. Culley said that since the beginning of President Nixon's War on Drugs there has been no real progress in keeping drugs out of the County, in dealing with drug-related crime, or in treating drug addiction.

The minutes from the Wednesday, January 4, 2017 regular session were approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols.

Gloria, County Veterans Services Officer, provided a departmental update, expressing that he's honored to have been the County VSO for two years, three months, thus far.

Among other details, he referenced a handout of his, and he mentioned VetraSpec, an automated system sponsored by the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs (ODVA), through which actions (compensation, pension, educational benefits, etc.) are submitted by personnel such as Gloria. He said, "It's very, very efficient," and ODVA's goal is to process each claim within two to three months. Gloria said that 670 County veterans are currently enrolled with VetraSpec (there are about 2,000 veterans in the County, and about 1,403 active files).

Operationally, ODVA provides 30% of Gloria's salary, and \$29,000 for outreach, including advertisements in print media (The Baker County Press, The Baker City Herald, and The Hells Canyon Journal), and via radio (104.7 KCMB, and 103.7 KBBL). He said the advertisements were worth the cost, and Harvey said he appreciates the outreach.

Gloria said that, for the first quarter of 2016 (July, August, September), he recorded 329 in-office interviews, and he received 822 phone calls (he answered the call, or a message was left), and he intends to speak with every contact. He asked that members of the public let him know if they're aware of a veteran who is in need of his services. He expressed praise for a mobile office setup that was paid for by outreach funding, which includes a scanner, a printer, and a wi-fi hotspot, allowing him to travel out into the field, and to file claims. He said that, since October 2014, through VetraSpec, \$759,320 has been recovered for County

veterans.

A discussion was held regarding the Intergovernmental Cooperative Agreement For Dispatch And Records Keeping Services, between Baker County and Baker City, which has been an ongoing negotiation, because of issues with the recommended makeup of the Consolidated Dispatch Center Board, and with compensation for operations of the Center. Harvey provided his own recommendations with an edited copy, changing and adding some language in the sections "Responsibility," page 2, and "Consideration," page 3.

Among other details, "Responsibility," his version states that the Baker County Consolidated Dispatch Center Board of Directors shall consist of five members, including the Baker County Commission Chair, the Baker City Manager, two members from the private sector (one from the County, and one from the City), and the last member appointed by the Fire Defense Board. His version also includes the recommendation of the City paying 75% of the cost, and the County 25%, for the dispatch services outlined in the agreement.

Harvey read a letter from Jo Marlette, and one from Debi Dugan, who were unable to attend the session. Marlette said she believes that the Board should include two members from the public, one each from the City, and the County, and that the public perspective is important.

Dugan said that she agrees that the Board should consist of five members, but she disagrees with one of the recommended versions of the agreement, which states that two members shall be appointed by the Board of Commissioners, two shall be appointed by City Council, and one shall be appointed by the entity paying the majority of the cost of the operation of the Dispatch Center (the City), which would stack the Board with elected officials, and leave Rural Fire and EMS out. She pointed out several other concerns of hers, as well.

Among Bennett's concerns, referencing Harvey's recommended version, he said that there should be more representation from law enforcement on the Board, and that there historically hasn't been public representation. Nichols asked at what point the process took a negative turn, and Harvey said the issue was the idea to add two more people to



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Steve Culley, at left, tells Commissioners about his son's suicide and drug addiction with hopes of one day seeing tax funds allocated to treat addiction.

the Board. After further discussion, Nichols made a motion to send a request to meet with City Council, to discuss the topic during an open meeting, and to attempt to negotiate, Harvey seconded the motion, and it carried.

A public hearing was held regarding a Supplemental Budget for the City of Unity (the Board acted as Unity City Council), because of unanticipated revenue, as Bennett stated. The City of Unity received \$76,860, in connection with the Rail Fire last year, from the U.S. Forest Service/Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, for use of the City's waste water pond, which will be used to pay off two debts, owed to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and to the State of Oregon, and to purchase chlorination equipment for Unity's water system.

Nichols read more details regarding Unity's various funds, and he said that the revenue from the U.S. Forest Service will allow Unity to finally be on positive footing, after years of financial struggle. Harvey and Bennett said also that the revenue helped to greatly improve Unity's financial situation, and Harvey thanked Montoya for his involvement. Montoya said that he wished to recognize Unity and the people there, and that every time the U.S. Forest Service personnel were present to fight fires, community members made every effort to accommodate them, to make the operation run more smoothly, and to make the best of a difficult situation. The Supplemental Budget was approved, with a motion

from Bennett, and a second from Harvey.

Yencopal discussed a Declaration Of Local Disaster, due to extreme winter conditions, signed on January 12, 2017. He said that he discussed the topic with other communities, and that most of the structural damage caused by the conditions is in Halfway, and there is an imminent threat to property and lives. He said that, among other resources, a crew of ten people was requested (from the Department of Corrections, in this case), in order to remove snow from structures in the Halfway area, including the school, and since road conditions are a major concern, he's discussing closures with the Oregon Department of Transportation, and Baker County Roadmaster Jeff Smith.

According to the Declaration, Baker County listed, among other items, the following need: manpower to shovel off roofs for the Halfway school; Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funding, to cover the extra costs of the additional time needed to remove the snow; and the Department of Consumer Services, Building Code Division, to grant authority to the Baker County Building Department Building Official, to aid in determining dangerous buildings within Baker County.

Yencopal said he provided City Halls within the County with structure damage claim forms, for citizens in the communities to use. Harvey urged citizens in the County to help others out with shoveling, clearing roofs, etc., and he said that structures

are being pushed to their maximum, where weight loads are concerned, and that damage is anticipated. The Declaration was ratified, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols.

Order No. 2017-108, Appointing Members To The Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care (EOCC) Local Community Advisory Council (LCAC), was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols. Rob Dennis, his term set to expire on February 1, 2017, Haley Hueckman and Beverly DuBosch, their terms set to expire on February 1, 2018, and Cathy Treadway, her term set to expire on February 1, 2019, were appointed.

Order No. 2017-109, Appointing A Member To The Baker County Weed Board, was approved, with a motion from Harvey, and a second from Nichols. Bennett was approved as the Commissioner Liaison.

Order No. 2017-110, Appointing Commissioner Nichols To Various Committees, was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Harvey. Nichols was appointed as Commissioner Liaison on the following committees: Baker County Mental Health Advisory Committee, Local Alcohol and Drug Planning Committee, Blue Mountain Translator District, and New Directions Northwest. Nichols was also approved, per the same Order, to serve as a member of the Northeast Oregon Economic Development District (NEOEDD), his term set to expire on December 31, 2018.

OTEC urges to stay away from power lines

With the strong winter storm system rolling through the area, Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative would like to remind everyone to stay far away from downed power lines and anything touching it – fallen trees, automobiles, yard equipment, etc.

"While downed lines can sometimes reveal they are live by arcing and sparking with electric-

ity, this is not always the case," said OTEC's Manager of Loss Control Jeff Anderson. "Power lines do not always show signs that they are live, but they are just as lethal. It is important to know that downed power lines are extremely dangerous and to stay very far away. Tell children to immediately report any fallen or dangling wires to an adult and always as-

sume that any power line is fully charged."

Power lines on the ground should always be treated as if they were a live wire. If you see any wires on the ground do not attempt to move or drive over the downed line.

"When current is flowing from a downed power line into the earth, a high-voltage condition is created," explains Anderson. "When

faced with this emergency scenario, it is important to remain a safe distance away. Voltage can be radiating from the downed line into the ground. If you step too close, electrical voltage can come back up through the ground and electrify you. This is called 'step potential.'"

Anderson advises, "If contact is made with an energized power line while

you are in a vehicle, the best thing to do is to try and remain calm and not get out unless the vehicle is on fire.

"If you must exit because of fire or other safety reasons, try to jump completely clear, making sure that you do not touch the equipment and the ground at the same time.

"Land with both feet together, maintain balance

and shuffle away in small steps to minimize the path of electric current and avoid electrical shock."

As a member-owned, non-profit electrical cooperative, OTEC offers public safety training to schools, emergency response organizations and government agencies.

For more information, contact your local OTEC office.