

# Local

## Commissioners hear small business, road dept. updates

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The Baker County Board of Commissioners held its first regular session of the month, on Wednesday, March 1, 2017, 9 a.m., in the Commission Chambers of the Baker County Courthouse, which included, among other topics, a Road Department update, and a Small Business Development Center update.

Present from the Board were Chair Bill Harvey, Commissioners Mark Bennett and Bruce Nichols, and Executive Assistant Heidi Martin.

Attendance also included Jefferson Mining District (JMD) Coordinating Officer Art Sappington, Baker County Road Master Jeff Smith, Blue Mountain Community College Small Business Development Center (BMCC SBDC) Baker County Advisor and Baker County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors President Jeff Nelson, Baker County Democratic Party Chair Marshall McComb, Forest Access For All (FAFA) President Tork Ballard, FAFA Secretary Wanda Ballard, Baker County Sheriff Travis Ash, Baker Heritage Museum Commission Chair Dave Hunsaker, and Baker Heritage Museum Commission Member Steve Bogart.

The meeting was called to order, and the Invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance were recited, both led by Harvey. The agenda was adopted, with some noted changes, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols.

Ed Trindle had originally been scheduled on the agenda to speak during Citizen Participation, however, he was unable to attend, and Sappington provided the sole comment for that segment, speaking on behalf of the JMD.

Sappington said the JMD, as a followup to previous discussions, had presented a statement to Representative Cliff Bentz, regarding the issues with the lack in federal and state agencies' recognition of mineral patents.

The minutes from the Wednesday, February 15, 2017 minutes were approved, with noted changes, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols.

Smith provided a Road Department update, which included comments about snowplowing efforts during this winter, which took up one-quarter of the year, to the cost of \$280,335, with 1,246 hours of overtime, and around \$80,000 spent on fuel.

Smith said spring maintenance on trucks is the next project on the list, and as soon as frost begins to wane in the different County areas, the Department will work on roads. He said that the Department's budget started out at about \$2.8 million, and that amount is down at the moment about \$400,000, including the loss of Secure Rural Schools (SRS) funding, but that number will be adjusted later in the fiscal year.

Harvey interjected and thanked Smith for his preparation, in anticipation of losing SRS funding.



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Steve Bogart and Dave Hunsaker discuss the Baker Heritage Museum with Commissioners.

Smith said he's confident about the possibility of funding from a state transportation package, which can compensate for the loss of SRS funding, and he said that the County's needs includes maintenance and improvements on outlying roads.

Smith said that the Department is down to a staff of thirteen and a half (the "half" is a half-time facility maintenance person, he said), and a new mechanic was hired on December 1, 2016, whom Smith showed praised for, as he was immediately tasked with dealing with equipment maintenance and repair this winter.

Smith said that about four miles of overlay was completed in the Sumpter Valley, about six miles of Granite Mountain Highway was completely rebuilt, and surface rock was hauled on about twelve miles of Sparta Road.

This year's projects includes an asphalt plant in Pleasant Valley, more surface rock work on numerous roads, and work to repair four bridges.

Bennett thanked Smith for the Department's efforts with the Bridgeport bridge, and Harvey emphasized that the Road Department had received many compliments and appreciation from County citizens this winter.

Nelson provided an SBDC update for the County, as he referred to a handout, copies of which he provided to those present. Giving an overview of the year, he said that 81 clients were counseled, 13 training events were held which included an attendance of 148—a significant increase—a capital infusion was seen of \$205,119 from 10 clients, who created 23 new jobs, there was an increase in sales of \$93,000, all of which translated to a great year, he noted.

Nelson said that there are four Pub Talks (public talks) scheduled for 2017: "What's in Store for 2017," on Wednesday, April 26, 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., at Lefty's Tap House, 1934 Broadway Street; "The Success Of Women Owned Business (Nelson noted that women-owned businesses see a success rate twice that of men-owned)," on Wednesday, May 24, at Lefty's; "Working your Website," Wednesday, September 13, at Lefty's;

and the "Annual PRCF (Powder River Correctional Facility) Public Talk," Wednesday, November 8, inside the PRCF.

Included in the handout were some SBDC-associated success stories, among them, Kristi Hensley of the Eagle Cap Grill Steak and Seafood, Veronica Johnson of the Wisdom House, Theresa Ball of Baker City Vape and Theresa's Treasures, and Dale Bogardus of Outstanding Computer Repair.

Nelson announced the ribbon-cutting launch party for The Sycamore Tree, on Friday, March 3, 2017, 1 p.m., with Josey Gaslin as the new business owner.

Order No. 2017-115, Appointing A Justice Of The Peace Pro-Tem For The Baker District, was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols.

According to the order, Damien Yervasi was appointed to serve during the absences of the Honorable Don Williams, for a term to expire on February 28, 2018.

Harvey began a discussion about a federal lawsuit filed by Columbia Riverkeepers, Idaho Rivers United, Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, and the Institute for Fisheries Resources, against the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and its new Administrator, Scott Pruitt, to attempt to force the EPA to form a plan, including a budget, to lower water temperatures in the Snake and Columbia rivers, in Oregon and Washington.

Harvey said he's in strong opposition to this lawsuit, the Board discussed the potential devastating effects from the action, and commented that efforts have historically been put into place, to help lower the temperatures, which is difficult, that every body of water needs a specific standard, and that the Board will be getting involved to show its opposition, at some point in the process.

Harvey mentioned a letter addressed to the Board, from the Deschutes County Board of Commissioners, requesting donations for the Western Interstate Region Conference (affiliated with the national Association of Counties), May 24-26, 2017. After some discussion, a donation of \$2,000 was approved (this

amount was donated in the past from the Board), with a motion from Harvey, and a second from Bennett.

An SRS Title III public hearing had been scheduled to include Baker County Emergency Management Deputy Director and Fire Authority Gary Timm, however, he was unable to attend, and Bennett explained Timm's absence, and provided details regarding the hearing.

He spoke about some funding uses, the majority going to personnel costs, and this funding allocation was approved to continue, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols.

Hunsaker and Bogart discussed a Baker Heritage Museum Manager Employment Agreement with the Board, between the County, and Carly M. Annable (formerly of Community Bank), explaining that the decision was made to enter into an agreement with a contract employee, in order to have more organized structure to the position, and to ultimately save on costs.

About a dozen people had applied for the position, Martin said. The proposed agreement was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols.

According to the agreement, Annable's term of employment is from March 5, 2017, through March 5, 2018, at the pay rate of \$2,028 per month.

Bennett began a discussion regarding the anticipated issues with County-wide services, in accommodating the potential number of visitors, during the solar eclipse, August 21, 2017.

He emphasized that the County welcomes, appreciates, and needs visitors, but that the County needs to be prepared for the event, in order to create a positive experience.

Harvey echoed Bennett's thoughts, and he said there are some community groups already stepping up and preparing, to help accommodate visitors, which he strongly encourages others to do, including providing camping spaces, rooms, etc.

Harvey emphasized that citizens providing these kinds of services will not be charged transient lodging taxes.

## Eclipse

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Pendleton, which has very few if any rooms left, is considering putting together a bus system to take people to communities in the path.

The event gathering in the Ochocos, which was expecting approximately 10,000 people, now has confirmed registrations for 35,000 people. They suggest that each local planning team needs to designate a county-wide website for information on emergency management, lodging, events, etc that link back to the Travel Oregon website.

According to Elizabeth Farrar the challenge of estimating the number of visitors one should expect is that there will be three types of visitors. The first is the international traveler who will have already booked their stay and will make a real trip of it staying a week or more.

The next is the domestic traveler who is booking their stays now and will make a weekend of the event. Then there is the most troublesome group the last-minute traveler who will decide Sunday or even Monday morning that they should probably head to a place where they can view the eclipse or decide that where they have already booked is not going to work because of the weather and will head to a better spot.

The last-minute traveler communities have no way of predicting but should expect last-minute travelers to come from all directions and as Huntington has been touted as the place to be, by eclipse websites, and should expect mass gatherings there.

Tom Davis from ODOT Region 5 reported that ODOT's statewide goal is to keep highways safe and to respond to incidents efficiently. They are expecting a million visitors throughout Oregon.

They are working on a draft plan which will be submitted in April and if approved published in June. They are especially concerned about 26, which closely follows the line of totality and is not made to handle the amount of traffic expected.

ODOT employees have been told there will be no time off given during the event and are being given safety briefings and supplied with eclipse glasses. Construction information trailers will be set up to quickly inform travelers of needed information as well as timely updates to tripcheck. The maintaining of telephone communication is a concern as cell phone towers could become overloaded by the extra large use expected so regional representatives of Oregon broadband council are working with telephone providers to address possible capacity issues.

Counties on the path of totality are all trying to gear-up and be prepared for not only the solar eclipse but fire season as well.

Baker County Commissioner Mark Bennett asked, "How are we gonna do this without funds? Nobody is stepping up with the money to prepare."

Not only is there a lack of first responders in this area but many areas don't have ambulance service or are hard-pressed to supply the necessary emergency equipment or personnel to handle a normal fire season. New EMS and call center personnel need to be trained and there is no fire services at all for 50 miles on 26.

Mutual aid agreements between our local area and outside agencies were suggested but the response was that even those outside agencies have to have their fuel and basic expenses paid for.

Craig Farley in response to this concern put together a group of emergency managers to assess the needs as a first step to looking for funding. At which point Alice Trindle suggested the funding issue needs to be addressed sooner rather than later as, "This is a 'disaster' we know is going to happen."

Present at the meeting where representatives of Emergency Management from Malheur, Wallowa and Baker Counties as well as Oregon Emergency Management, Chamber of Commerce representatives from Huntington, Ontario and Baker County, ODOT, BLM, Eastern Oregon Visitors Association, Farewell Bend State Park, Life-flight, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, Baker County Sheriff's Office, Travel Oregon and the State Regional Solutions Office.

## Planning hearing to focus on Sumpter mining claim

On March 23rd, 2017 at 6 p.m., the Baker County Planning Commission will hold a public hearing to consider the remand of County Case PA-16-002 from the Baker County Board of Commissioners.

PA-16-002 is a proposal by Nodon Properties, LLC to re-zone a ±9 acre property known as Tax Lot 1600 of Township 9 South, Range 37 East, Section 20 from Rural Residential (RR-5) to Mineral Extraction (ME). The property is part of the Sumpter Deep Gravel Mining Claim patent.

The application and other materials are available from the Planning Department and will be evaluated using criteria listed in the BCZO Chapters 260 and 430, the Baker County Comprehensive Land Use Plan, and OAR 660-023-0030, 660-023-0040, 660-023-0050 and 660-023-0180.

All written testimony must be submitted to the Planning Department by no later than 5:00 p.m. on the hearing date or submitted in person during the hearing.

If you have questions regarding PA-16-003, please contact Eva Henes at (541) 523-8219 or at [eceder@bakercounty.org](mailto:eceder@bakercounty.org).

The Planning Department is located in the basement of the Baker County Courthouse, 1995 Third Street, Suite 131, Baker City, Oregon.