

Local

County: Weed MOU inked

BY TODD ARRIOLA
Todd@TheBakerCountyPress.com

The Baker County Board of Commissioners held its first regular session of the month on Wednesday, in the Commission Chambers of the Baker County Courthouse, which included a County Planning Department update from Director Holly Kerns, a Tri-County Cooperative Weed Management Area (TCWMA) agreement amendment discussion and approval with interim Director Samantha Bernards and TCWMA Board of Directors Chair Dan Sharratt, and a discussion of Blue Mountain Translator District antenna fee collection issues with County Assessor Kerry Savage.

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

Attendance also included Baker County Parks and Recreation Director Karen Spencer, Baker County Weed Master Arnie Grammon, Baker County Sheriff Travis Ash, Wanda Ballard, Art Sappington, John Creighton, Ed Hardt, Tom Muller, and Mark Sayers.

Citizen Participation included Muller, who expressed disappointment with the Board's approval of State Representative and Baker County Economic Development Director Greg Smith's request for an increase of \$12,000 per contract, for a new total of \$108,000 per year, for economic development services (from Greg Smith & Company, LLC), which had previously been approved by the Economic Development Council. Muller said that Harvey stated, in a *Baker City Herald* article, that Smith deserved the raise. "It is so sad that you do so, at a time when so many people in the City, area, and County are...struggling to make ends meet..." Muller said, and he added that he believes there are conflicts involved.

Nichols invited Muller to the afternoon Economic Development Council (EDC) meeting, held at 1 p.m. the same day, "...so you could learn some more facts...I think it would be very beneficial for you to learn more...than what you have, because what you have written in the letter there (Muller read from it) is not really accurate... you'll learn why the Commissioners voted the way they did," Nichols said. Muller attended the EDC meeting, but he didn't provide any comment.

Citizen Participation also included Ballard, who asked about the status of meetings regarding the proposed Boardman to Hemingway transmission line project, and Bennett said that there will be a Baker County meeting, including Bennett and Kerns, on Monday, August 14, 2017, 5 p.m., in the Commission Chambers.

Hardt spoke of issues regarding federal regulations and permits, and other road blocks to potential rare earth mining in the County; Sayers asked about what the County is doing in preparation for the Total Solar Eclipse event in the area of Durkee, and Bennett said that, among other plans, the Oregon



Samantha Bernards and Dan Sharratt.

Department of Forestry (ODF) will commit an additional ten fire engines to the County; and Sappington discussed several issues, including Revised Statutes (RS) 2477 roads and closures, and inappropriate/unauthorized agency Virtue Flat signage.

The minutes from the Wednesday, July 19, 2017 regular session were approved, with a couple of changes, with a motion from Nichols, and a second from Harvey.

Kerns provided a Planning Department update, which included details of the Department's preparation for the Total Solar Eclipse event. She said that the largest group gathering might be 3,000 people, and the Department is communicating with different communities to "...plan ahead, and try to prevent anything from going wrong with those events..." Kerns said that Durkee and Unity are two of the "hot spots" for viewing of the eclipse.

She also said, among other details, that the Department is working on implementing State Sage Grouse reporting requirements; that the Unity-based solar facility was the first application of its kind approved by the Planning Commission; that the County's position on the Boardman to Hemingway (B2H) project hasn't changed (the County doesn't support the route through the County); and that looking ahead, the Department plans to address the inconsistencies in the Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

A Professional Services Agreement (PSA), between the County and Baker County Unlimited (BCU, the Baker County Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau), for the operation of the Visitors Bureau, was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols.

According to the agreement, the term is July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2019, and the County will pay BCU \$6,225.33 per month.

A Baker County Fair Board agreement, between the County and Sid Johnson & Company, for pier and fence reconstruction work on the Baker County Rodeo Grandstand, was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols. According to the agreement, the County will pay Sid Johnson & Company \$47,400 for the work.

A Memorandum Of Agreement (MOU), between the Baker County Weed Department, and the

Burnt River Soil and Water Conservation District, for services to include surveying and inventorying approximately 2,000 acres of riparian habit in order to create individual assessment and treatment plans per landowner, to treat weed infestations in Camp Creek, was approved, with a motion from Harvey, a second from Nichols, and a recusal noted from Bennett, as he stated there may be a conflict. According to the MOU, the Weed Department will contribute project match, in the form of in-kind labor, valued at \$2,000.

Grammon discussed the MOU prior to its approval.

Bernards and Sharratt discussed a TCWMA Agreement, including proposed amendments, with the Board, for over half an hour (there are continuing issues with the TCWMA/County relationship, specifically with the lack of representative staff in the County, where most work is performed), and only the amendments were approved to be ratified at that time, with a motion from Harvey, and a second from Bennett.

The approved amendment in Article V, "Tri-County CWMA Governing Board Membership," reads as follows: "The Board shall consist of one County Commissioner from each county of the Tri-County area, one Noxious weed supervisor from each county, one Weed Board Member from each county..." The current language had included one "Weed Board Chair," in place of "Weed Board Member."

The approved amendment in Article VIII, "Executive Committee," reads as follows: "An Executive committee is hereby established, composed of the three officers of the Governing Board of the Tri-County CWMA and one County Commissioner from each of the participating Counties." The current language had included "two Board members elected by the Board," in place of "one County Commissioner."

Order No. 2017-141, Designating A Newspaper Of Record, was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols. According to the order, *The Baker City Herald*, the sole applicant, was designated.

Order No. 2017-142, Designating A Newspaper For Publication Of The Annual Foreclosure Of The Tax Liens As Shown By The Baker County Foreclosure List, was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from

Nichols.

Order No. 2017-143, 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 motion from Harvey, and a second from Bennett. The minimum value for Reference No. 12061, 42.5 acres, known as Puzzle Creek, was set at \$46,500, with a motion from Harvey, and a second from Bennett. The minimum value for Reference No. 12169, 120.94 acres, known as Shanghai Creek Park, was set at \$88,500, with a motion from Harvey, and a second from Bennett. Spencer discussed the details of the order, prior to its approval.

The amount of up to \$10,000 was approved for Eastern Oregon Counties Association (EOCA) dues yearly, along with a letter from the Board to that effect to be sent to EOCA, the notification of which would be each May, with a motion from Harvey, and a second from Nichols. The Board discussed an invoice for EOCA dues in the amount of \$14,200, from Union County, which prompted the discussion and decision.

During Commissioner Update, the formation of an Audit Committee was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Harvey.

Prior to the motion, Nichols discussed the need for the committee with the Board, for large budgets, such as the County's.

Savage discussed issues with delinquent fees associated with broadcast signal antennas, on properties covered by the Blue Mountain Translator District (BMTD), in response to internal issues with BMTD, which has shown 1,000 uncollected fees, prompting heated phone calls from citizens.

Savage said he's seen a large amount of uncollected fees (\$100 per year currently for each account) for use of BMTD signals in the past, but not on this scale (last year, the number was around 260, with around 120 the year before). Nichols (who serves on the BMTD Board) said that Richard Chaves of Chaves Consulting explained how the associated tracking and billing software should work, since there were apparently issues with data entry and use of the software, and Nichols said that he's been assured that there will be a revised list by September 1st.

Governor declares wildfire state of emergency

Governor Brown Wednesday declared a state of emergency in response to wildfire activity across the state. Hot, dry, and windy conditions and forecasts for more thunderstorms around the state have resulted in multiple red flag warnings, placing Oregon in a critical fire danger situation. The entire region is experiencing similar issues, resulting in a strain on resources. The declaration enables the Oregon National Guard to mobilize resources on an as-needed basis to assist the Department of Forestry and the Oregon State Fire Marshal's Office with firefighting.

"As Oregon faces a near record-breaking heatwave, the threat of wildfires increases," Governor Brown said. "I am thankful to the firefighters and crews working tirelessly throughout the state, and remind all Oregonians to be safe and follow posted fire bans. Our state agencies have a long-standing tradition of collaboration, and this declaration of emergency will ensure they have the resources needed to minimize the impact of wildfires."

ODOT announces distracted driver campaign

Nearly 500 people lost their lives on Oregon roads in 2016 – erasing a decade's worth of gains. Crash data analysis points towards a contributing cause: distracted driving. Every three hours someone is injured by a distracted driver in Oregon. Over 75% of Oregonians admit to doing it, but almost the same number don't like it when others drive distracted. It's reached epidemic proportions. Recent research suggests we simply can't stop looking at our phones, even while driving. In short, we're addicted.

The Oregon Department of Transportation has teamed up with LifeSaver to help reduce distracted driving by making healthy driving a game. Beginning September 1st, the department and its partners: AAA of Oregon/Idaho and the Oregon State Police, invite those who drive in Oregon to join the movement towards healthy driving at DriveHealthy.org.

The concept is simple. Groups of Oregonians band together to compete with others to see who can keep their phones locked while driving. School against school, Rotary club against the Kiwanis, one church challenges another across town. The free app shows the top scorers in each category, plus your organization's monthly score.

"As a culture I think we're ready for a change," says ODOT Communications Manager Tom Fuller. "The stories of deaths and injuries from distracted driving are as horrific as they are preventable." The campaign comes as the result of the recommendations from a statewide task force convened by ODOT Director Matthew Garrett in 2016. The task force recommended a positive approach to the problem. "Healthy driving is our way of changing the conversation from shaming a negative behavior, to encouraging a positive one," says Fuller.

Organizations can register at www.DriveHealthy.org, then on September 1st they download the free app and the competition begins. Each month is a new opportunity to compete. Will it be effective? A recent similar campaign in Boston reduced distracted driving by 47%.

The campaign already has many partners. In addition to AAA Oregon/Idaho, ODOT, and the Oregon State Police, they include: the Oregon Association of Broadcasters, the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association and LifeSaver. More partners are coming on board each week.

The campaign also encourages local advocates to help reduce distracted driving in their communities. <https://www.drivehealthy.org/resources/> includes links to toolkits where these advocates can do their own observational studies of distracted driving in their community and petition local jurisdictions to pass proclamations and policies to encourage healthy driving. The Resources page also has stories on distracted driving as well as links to research studies and background.

City Planning to meet

The Baker City Planning Commission will hold a public hearing at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, August 16th, 2017 in the Council Chambers at the Baker City Hall, 1655 1st Street, Baker City, Oregon, followed by a work session.

VAC-17-068: A petition for the vacation of a public street has been received for an undeveloped portion of Allen Street, located within the Commercial-General Zone. The street is located in Township 9 South, Range 40 East, Section 15, and is located between Windmill Lane and I-84. The public is invited to attend this hearing and to submit oral or written testimony. Testimony and relevant evidence, both in support of or in opposition to the proposal, must be based on the applicable review criteria and submitted to the Planning Department by 5:00 p.m. on the hearing date, Wednesday, August 16th, 2017, or in person during the hearing.

The staff report will be available for inspection on or before August 9th, 2017 at the Baker County Courthouse at 1995 3rd Street, Baker City.