

Business / Agriculture

City Council and County Commissioners meet about SAFER grant, finances



Gina K. Swartz / The Baker County Press

County and City held a joint meeting last week.

• ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, 911 ALSO DISCUSSED

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Last Wednesday evening the Baker City Council joined the Baker County Commissioners in a joint meeting. The reason the two separate governing bodies came together was to address the recently awarded SAFER grant the city received from FEMA.

Before the topic was addressed, County Commissioners heard a marketing update from Timothy Bishop, a 911 Center update from Sheriff Travis Ash and an Economic Development from Greg Smith.

Bishop quickly gave his update, stating, "Tourism for us is clicking along this year."

He noted the August 21, Total Solar Eclipse as a largely successful event that drew large numbers, but noted that aside from that tourism numbers were strong for the year.

He stated that Transient Lodging taxes up 8% at the end of the Fiscal Year June 30, 2017.

He said that he was expanding his marketing to include more locally sourced products and experiences to draw visitors to the area.

He also told Councilors and Commissioner that the number of privately owned vacation rental and B&B rentals was increasing in our area.

Sheriff Ash Spoke about the 911 Center, which was recently returned to the control of the Sheriff. Since taking over the center three months ago Ash said, "We are at full staff with eight full-time dispatchers."

As of October 1, an assistant was hired to help manage the center.

Morale is high and the transition to his taking over control has been smooth, he said. He has already seen some savings by implementation of new scheduling. He advised that they had lost one repeater site due to cost increases but were able to transition the users to another repeater without serious issue and he is working to find a cost-

effective replacement for that site.

Ash advised that some new systems were on the horizon for the center with new equipment, that was State-provided.

Commissioner Mark Bennett told Ash, "We should say thank you for your staff during the eclipse; they put in above and beyond."

Economic Development Director Greg Smith updated City Council and County Commissioners next.

Smith began by stating that unemployment in Baker County was at just 4.5% and he was aware of at least 85 available jobs currently though the Employment Department. He said, "Ranging from a dishwasher to a teacher to administrative to professional. One of the things we're hearing quite often from our employers is that they are struggling to find adequate labor."

These statistics and openings are available to any member of the public via www.worksourceoregon.com.

Smith told Council and Commissioners that he and his staff assist local businesses and do outreach. He stated they work with between 13 and 18 business every month to help them improve. He and his staff are assessing empty buildings within the city and evaluating what type of businesses might fit well in that space then sending out informational packets to business that fit the model to let them know that these buildings are available.

Smith stated he is currently working to bring additional business to Baker City that would add several well-paying, benefited jobs to the community much like the plans to rehabilitate and open a "destination" truck stop in adjoining Malheur County at Farewell Bend.

However, the concern remained with the Commissioners that there was still a problem with finding adequate workers to fill positions, albeit still a positive bringing additional employers to the area.

The final discussion of the evening was in regard to the SAFER grant. The City is proposing to the County that part of the funding for the grant fall

upon their shoulders, to the tune of \$90,000 to \$95,000 over the course of the three-year grant period.

Currently Baker City Fire responds to all calls within the County except for Richland and Halfway and Unity.

Baker City Fire currently provides this service outside its City Limits without additional cost to the County.

Statistics provided to Commissioners show that the average of County calls for service was at about 22% and that recorded call volume has increased every year and that trend is expected to continue to increase.

With many of the County calls being paid by Medicaid or Medicare, which pay only a portion of the bill, the City is barely covering their expenses.

As call volume increases, staffing will also need to increase.

As budget concerns continue to plague both City and County budgets, in part due to rising PERS costs, the SAFER grant seemed the best feasible way to fund additional needed staff at minimal cost.

Warner addressed the Commissioners saying that he realized the grant was forcing them to make some very tough decisions, one being reducing the service area of Baker City Fire in the County adversely affecting residents. Another being not accepting the grant at all.

Warner said, "Regardless of whether or not we accept this SAFER grant, we're going to have to have a conversation about how we deliver ambulance service in Baker County."

"This is a good time for us to try to come up with money for the SAFER grant to where we could assure that we have good ambulance service for the next three years and hope that we can do something in those three years to keep ambulance service for those that have been receiving it over the last twenty years."

He also noted that he understood that these were big decisions that affected a lot of people's lives.

Commissioner Bruce Nichols said that he felt there was some confusion and said, "We are right at

the end here." He referred to the October 31 deadline to accept the grant or not.

He felt that they (the Commissioners) were being asked to make a decision too quickly. He said, "It would be nice if we could study this a little bit, talk about it a little bit and see if we can get some ideas. We are down to a deadline is there a way we could extend it out?"

Warner replied to Nichols saying, "I don't think we can extend the acceptance of the grant we can extend the debate. City Council could accept the grant and then continue the debate moving forward."

Commissioner Bennett asked, "If we approached them saying you were bringing in an additional partner, which the County would be, use our elected Federal officials to help us carry that forward while we work on some of the issues here ... There are some extreme complexities here. It's challenging, there is a variety of issues. If the County says we can't come up with the money and the City says we can't come up with the money and we miss this window, and the City is forced to reduce its response area, then we have large number of folks without services—and we determine as a County we can't come up with an alternative and we come back to you then it's going to be something like, 'We're going to need \$200,00.' That is significantly more."

Bennett stated that while this was the eleventh hour, he felt an extension was necessary since the dynamics are changing and more time was needed to try and put together a partnership.

He said, "We need to have more discussion on this. The County needs to. We are extremely late coming into the game here."

Nichols even suggested ODOT kicking in some money or some of the other smaller communities within the county but said on short notice that was difficult to do.

Bennett also stated that he knew that they had received commitments from the office of Rural Health and the Oregon Health Authority office of EMS.

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— WEEKLY HAY REPORT —

Friday, October 13, 2017 — Eastern Oregon

Prices trended generally steady in a limited test. Sporadic rain showers and thunderstorms in hay growing areas has hindered haying process. Retail/ Stable type hay remains the largest demanded hay.

Tons	Price Range	Wtd Avg
Alfalfa / Large Square Premium	100 180.00-180.00	180.00
Alfalfa Large Square Good	220 160.00-160.00	160.00
Orchard Grass Small Square Premium	75 175.00-175.00	175.00
Timothy Grass Small Square Premium	45 200.00-200.00	200.00

USDA Market News Service—AMS.USDA.gov

— CATTLE MARKET REPORT —

Wednesday, October 11, 2017
Vale, Oregon

Cattle sold through the auction: 1,917

Steer Calves

300-400#	Bulk 181.00-209.00	Top 217.00
400-500#	Bulk 159.00-193.00	Top 200.00
500-600#	Bulk 145.00-163.00	Top 164.00

Heifer Calves

300-400#	Bulk 154.00-181.00	Top 182.00
400-500#	Bulk 136.00-161.00	Top 173.00
500-600#	Bulk 129.00-147.00	Top 147.75

Yearling Steers

600-700#	Bulk 134.00-158.00	Top 163.50
700-800#	Bulk 132.00-143.00	Top 145.50
800-900#	Bulk 123.00-137.00	Top 139.00
900-1,000#	Bulk N/A	Top N/A

Yearling Heifers

600-700#	Bulk 131.00-144.00	Top 146.75
700-800#	Bulk 119.00-128.00	Top 132.00
800-900#	Bulk 117.00-126.00	Top 130.00
900-1,000#	Bulk N/A	Top N/A

Thin Shelly Cows	42.00-59.00
Butcher Cows	63.00- 69.00
Butcher Bulls	65.00-79.00
Stock Cows	N/A
Younger Hfrts.	76.00-103.00
Stock Cows Young	- 1275.00 - 1610.00
ProducersLivestock.com	
541-473-3136	

— LOG PRICE REPORT —

Prices are based on the majority of saw mills in Northeastern Oregon and Central Idaho. The prices listed below are a composite prices of various sawmills willing to visit with me about this topic.

Ponderosa Pine—small diameter class 8-11 inches diameter class \$250 per mbf. Only one sawmill was willing to buy small diameter pine at this time.

Ponderosa Pine—medium diameter class 12-17 inches diameter class \$300 to \$350 per mbf

Ponderosa Pine-large diameter class 18 plus inches diameter class \$380 to \$410 per mbf

The Pine prices are still approximately \$40 per mbf below average lumber/log market due to 2017 fire salvage

Doug Fir & Western Larch—\$380 to \$420 per mbf. Normal prices typically ranged between \$425 to \$475 per mbf.

White Fir—\$300 per mbf. Normal prices typically ranged between \$340 to \$360 per mbf.

Engelmann Spruce—\$350 at one Idaho sawmill, other sawmills including with White fir prices.

In general, the log prices still impacted from 2015 fire season and fire salvage that resulted. Sawmills are starting to get log yard inventory in line with sawmill production needs. With a new Administration as of 1/20/2017, a more normal economic environment should result and hopefully a more healthy housing situation will result in a better climate for Northeast Oregon Sawmill and private forest landowners.

Courtesy of Arvid Andersen,
Andersen Forestry Consulting

— PRECIOUS METALS REPORT —

Price per ounce, USD

Gold: \$1,289.70

Silver: \$17.10

Platinum: \$934.82

Palladium: \$986.25

Bloomberg.com

— AG COMMODITIES —

Corn: \$350.00/bu/USD

Wheat: \$434.00/bu/USD

Soybeans: \$984.75/bu/USD

Oats: \$264.00 bu/USD

Rough Rice: \$12.12/cwt/USD

Canola: \$507.00 CAD/mwt

Live Cattle: \$115.98/lb./USD

Feeder Cattle: \$150.40/lb./USD

Lean Hogs: \$62.18/lb./USD

Bloomberg.com