

Local

County approves \$99K to City over three years

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Present from the Board were Chair Bill Harvey, Commissioners Mark Bennett and Bruce Nichols, and Executive Assistant Heidi Martin. Attendance also included Baker County Planning Director Holly Kerns, Baker County Administrative Services Director Christena Cook, Baker County Technology Department Director Bill Lee, Baker County Emergency Management Director Jason Yencopal, Baker County Emergency Management Deputy Director/Fire Authority Gary Timm, Baker County Sheriff Travis Ash, Baker County Facilities Maintenance Foreman Dan McQuisten, Baker City Manager Fred Warner, Baker City Interim Fire Chief Cliff Hall, Baker Heritage Museum Vice Chair Dave Hunsaker, and Tork and Wanda Ballard.

Harvey opened the session, provided the Invocation, and led in recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. The agenda was adopted, with no noted changes, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols.

Citizen Participation included Muller, who said he disagreed with the Board's decision not to take any action against County Planning Commissioner Rob Crawford, whose two non-permitted (at the time) home additions were brought to the attention of the City Building Department and the County Planning Department, by a County citizen, this spring (this initial Building Department investigation is detailed in the Friday, September 22, 2017 issue of *The Baker County Press*).

The Board subsequently decided to allow the investigative process to continue, and to send the matter to the Planning Commission for its own review.

Muller said, "You all agreed that the responsibility lies with the Planning Commission. This is an example of the 'Good Ole Boy' system ... You don't punish them ... This ... way of handling those of you who violate the rules and by-laws of the County is appalling. It must stop ... I ask that you three Commissioners fire Robert Crawford ... If one of the Planning Commission members ... cannot keep his Planning Commission rules himself, then he should not be a member..."

Harvey said the process is continuing, and, "We're not done yet ... They (the Planning Commission) have the opportunity and the right to make a decision, if they're going to make one ... Then, it comes to us ... We didn't send it off to them to sweep it under the rug—we sent it off to them, because that's our responsibility to do..."

Bennett said, "I'm certain we can agree that everyone is entitled to due process. Everyone is entitled to review ... Without that, it would be really unfair, to unilaterally fire him, without any due process..."

Nichols echoed the Board's sentiments, and



Todd Arriola / The Baker County Press

Baker City Manager Fred Warner, Jr. addresses the three Baker County Commissioners.

said, "We did not have all the facts ... We couldn't make a decision with the information that we had at the time ..."

Muller asked when the Board first knew of the reported conditions, Harvey said he'd read about it in the article, and Bennett said he knew earlier, but he didn't realize what the magnitude of the projects was at the time.

Crawford was first appointed as a Planning Commissioner last December, and re-appointed in September.

The minutes from the Wednesday, October 4, 2017 regular session were approved, with no noted corrections, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols.

Lee provided a Technology Department update, which included, among other details, a discussion of the County Courthouse's new backup power generator, which sits in a fenced area near the building, on the north side.

Lee said, "I want to emphasize the importance of the backup generator..." He spoke about the issues of the past, with only the department's (costly) battery backup systems in place, and the hours it took to revive affected equipment, a situation that's been vastly improved with the generator.

He said there's an advantage to not losing power, over losing it and regaining it.

Lee said that the Health Department, the Sheriff's Department, and now the County Courthouse, all have backup generator power.

Addendum No. 7 to a lease agreement, between the County and Sackos Land Company, Ltd., for real property commonly known as the Pochontas Medical Office Building, located at 3330 Pochontas Road, was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols. The new lease agreement covers the period of July 1, 2017, through June 30, 2018.

A Baker Heritage Museum drywall repair and replace bid, from Baker-based Damschen Interiors, Inc., for a total of \$13,843, was approved, with a motion from Bennett, and a second from Nichols.

The sole bid received was from Damschen, to address interior water damage during last winter, McQuisten explained.

A County Facilities purchase, for a John Deere 1023E Sub-Compact Utility Tractor, for a total of \$21,450, was approved, with a motion from Harvey, and a second from Nichols.

As McQuisten explained, the tractor is being purchased to replace a Grasshopper lawn machine, purchased in 1995, and primarily used for cleaning ice and snow from sidewalks, that has since become inoperable, without available parts.

A Professional Services Agreement, between the County, and Doni Bruland, for the services of researching and applying for funding opportunities, through local, state, and federal agencies, for the prevention and treatment of invasive weed species in the County, was approved, with a motion from Nichols, and a second from Bennett.

The agreement covers the period of July 1, 2017, through June 30, 2018, and the County will pay Bruland up to \$3,000.

The Board discussed the City's proposed acceptance of a SAFER grant (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response), with Warner.

As detailed in the Friday, October 13, 2017 issue of *The Baker County Press*, acceptance of the grant, which would add three positions to the Fire Department, would require a substantial funding match from the City, funds it doesn't have, which prompted the discussion with the County.

Warner suggested earlier that an open position at the Police Department, which the newly implemented public safety fee was meant in large part to help fund and save, be left unfilled in order to find funding.

During discussion of the issue, Harvey asked what the City's shortfall would be, with acceptance of the grant, and Warner said \$33,000 per year, for the next three years.

Bennett and Nichols emphasized the need to assist the City with the funding shortfall, and Bennett said

there isn't much choice.

Nichols said he likes a previously suggested idea, to first use a one-time payment of tax money collected from the legal sales of marijuana, which could be around \$30,000 each, for the City and the County (both entities had opted out of allowing dispensaries), but this funding has yet to be received.

Harvey stressed that ideas for the three-year period would amount to a "band-aid," (those discussing the topic agreed) and a short-term fix, and that not all funding is guaranteed.

Ultimately, up to \$99,000 was approved to be paid to the City, over the course of four budget periods, with any cost savings shared, with further details to be worked out between Cook and the City, with a motion from Nichols, a second from Bennett, and Harvey abstaining (he said he was not opposed, but just abstaining).

The Board held a public hearing in the matter of Ordinance No. 2017-05, Baker County Mineral Leasing Rules; Declaring An Emergency.

The purpose of the ordinance, as stated in the document, "...is to prescribe uniform procedures for obtaining and conducting operations under and mining leases covering County-owned lands and mineral rights under the jurisdiction of the County of Baker."

Kerns provided some maps for the Board to review, in regard to acreage and parcel locations, related to potential mining (mining of the Sumpter Dredge tailings was discussed specifically during previous sessions).

After some discussion, Bennett said he, Kerns, and Yencopal will travel to the locations to complete further research, to clarify access, among other details.

The Board discussed some changes to the ordinance, which Kerns then made, returning later during the session, with copies of the amended document.

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Wyden holds town hall



Samantha O'Conner / The Baker County Press

Sen. Ron Wyden.

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Thursday, October 12th, Senator Ron Wyden held his second Baker City town hall meeting this year. In the meeting, Wyden welcomed questions and statements from those attending and answered questions regarding local concerns, health care, war and several other topics.

The first question for the night was concern about war between the U.S. and North Korea.

Wyden said he is also concerned about the situation with North Korea and discussed non-military tools that could open conversations between the U.S. and North Korea. He discussed his support of sanctions, increasing trade with North Korea.

"I do think that members of Congress on both sides of the aisle, Democrats and Republicans, based on that sanctions vote right before the summer recess is a very strong signal that, what has traditionally been Democrat or Republican deference to the Executive Branch, the Commander in Chief, members are now saying there's going to have to be a lot more oversight and a lot more done to try to deal with these challenges," explained Wyden.

For the second question, they talked about the Affordable Care Act, and asked why Wyden thought it was so hard for congress to figure out how to do that for everybody.

"First, I am very much for universal coverage," explained Wyden.

He discussed that money is being spent but not in the right places and controlling health care prices and prescription medication costs.

"There are going to be a lot of approaches on the table," explained Wyden. "But if you share my view, both for moral and economic reasons, we've got to get all Americans good quality affordable coverage and for the amount we are spending today, we can do it. This is going to be priority business."

One member of the audience brought up having her television through Blue Mountain Translator District and T-Mobile is "somehow coming in and causing all sorts of chaos." She asked if there was anything he could do to stop it.

Wyden explained that he is very concerned about TV monopolies coming in and changing local agreements. "One of the biggest areas we're going to have to push back on involves communications and the monopolies," said Wyden.

He went on to discuss Net Neutrality, which is people paying their internet access fee and people can go where they want, when they want, and how they want. He explained the "big guys are coming in and they don't like Net Neutrality."

"What I do when an industry wants to do something that's going to charge people a lot more than they're being charged today, I say it's my job to unpack that and to make an independent judgment about what's needed to protect the consumer," said Wyden.

An audience member thanked Wyden for his wildfire funding efforts and asked for comments on them. Wyden explained that the fires that Oregon had this year were "not your grandfather's fires—they're bigger, they're hotter, they're more powerful."

"If you had told me when first came to Oregon in 1971 that we'd see a fire that could jump the Columbia River, you know cause it's been Forestry 101 that a river works as a break on fires and we had it literally leap the river," said Wyden. "Southern Oregon, the Brookings Fire, Willamette Valley, the Gorge, and all over the state, we saw these extraordinary fires and it just seems to me the single most important thing has to be finding smarter and more effective way to prevent these huge fires in the first place. That's the most important thing."

Wyden then discussed the Dreamers or the DACA kids and explained that they are college students, trying to be college students, or working and often came to the U.S. with their parents when they were two months old and have not been back to Mexico.

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