

Local

Sumpter talks about rates

BY MEGHAN ANDERSCH
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Sumpter City Council met the drizzly evening of January 9th with Mayor Cary Clarke and Councilors Linda Wise and Samantha Rowan in attendance. Council approved minutes of December 12.

Clarke motioned to pay all bills except for one for himself for work done for the City and one for his brother related to the Fire Department. Motion passed unanimously. Rowan motioned to approve the other two bills. Motion passed with two votes, Clarke abstaining. Reports

Julie McKinney reported water is running fine. Jeff McKinney can still run up to McCully, due to the odd weather and can get the readings he has to take at the intake. Clarke conceded the weather is good in that way, but "we'll pay for it later".

Kurt Clarke reported for the Fire Department that it's been a quiet month. He thanked all who donated and helped with the food boxes. About eight were put together.

There was one EMS call this month. They also had a pizza night for the firefighters. The last meeting was a CPR and AED refresher class. For the rest of the winter, they'll "hit medical pretty darn hard".

For the Planning Commission, John Young reported no quorum for the regular monthly meetings. The Commission planned to hold a special meeting Thursday the 11th at 2 PM and Young asked anyone with pertinent information to get it to City Hall. Resolution 343

Clarke asked LeAnne Woolf to explain the raise in sewer rates. Woolf stated that related to the DEQ-required upgrade is a requirement that the City have a coverage ratio equal to 1.2 or more.

The sewer rate is made up of the basic rate; a monthly pumping charge as insurance toward the time when the tank needs to be pumped, about every 10 years for a residence; and user fees that will fluctuate once the City starts reading meters.

Woolf stated that the coverage ratio is usually calculated on residences only, but because Sumpter has so many that are occupied only part of the year, she included businesses in the figure to take some pressure off the residences. She stated that increases have all be going on residences.

Clarke stated it is his feeling a business can pass that number on to custom-

ers.

For residents, especially those on fixed incomes, he urged keeping increases as low as possible.

Rowan asked the last time business rates were increased.

Woolf stated effective November 2015.

Clarke asked how much the rates will go up per month.

Woolf stated residence rates will raise by \$3 per month and restaurants by \$5 per month, although it will look like \$7 to the restaurants because the last increase of \$2 did not update in the accounting software, so restaurants have been undercharged over the last couple years.

Woolf stated many factors and much research has gone into this suggestion. Rates will need to be revisited in June of each year to keep the 1.2 ratio.

Young asked if the ratio this now a requirement as opposed to a recommendation.

Woolf responded that this is a requirement to receive the funding for upgrades. Young asked about the shape of the sewer reserve fund.

Woolf stated it stands at about \$17,000 currently.

Heather Wilson asked about the meter reading in relation to the City recommendation that residents keep their water running all the time in the winter to avoid freeze-ups.

Woolf explained she looked at Baker City's fee structure, and they take an average over certain months for setting the use rate. McKinney stated John Day and all the little towns around do the same thing.

McKinney read the resolution, which will take effect February 1, 2018. Motion to approve it passed unanimously.

Resolution 346

McKinney explained this resolution is required every year to pay for volunteers Worker's Compensation. She read the ordinance in entirety.

Wise asked if this is the Worker's Comp nobody can use.

Woolf confirmed this and that the State says nonetheless it is law that the City have and pay for it. Motion to approve the resolution passed unanimously.

Alley Vacation between Bonanza and Ibex

Clarke stated he doesn't like doing alley vacations, because in fifteen or twenty years, the City may need to get utilities down there. He asked if the City can vacate the alley to let residents do things without relinquishing ability to come in later. Present property owners stated they signed right of way



Meghan Andersch / The Baker County Press

Heather Wilson inviting all to attend a preliminary planning session for the 2018 Christmas Bazaar.

for the power company.

McKinney explained if the City vacates the alley, the land goes on the property owners' deeds.

A determination was postponed to research the correct verbiage to allow affected residents to use the land with the understanding the City may need to access it in the future. McKinney agreed to get in touch with Bend, as that City recently did something similar.

Council Input

Rowan mentioned the marijuana sales tax. Woolf said she can't report specific numbers for the amount received, as laws prohibit telling anything about taxes from certain entities.

However, the City has so far received more in the 3% sales tax than in property taxes for this fiscal year.

Property taxes received for this fiscal year are about \$22,500.

Funds from the sales tax are going evenly into general and street funds.

Marijuana tax funds cannot go in the water and sewer accounts where the City has federal loans.

Jennifer Lake asked, with Jeff Sessions going against marijuana federally, will Sumpter potentially have to fight in the future to retain the dollars from the sales tax. Woolf stated if anything happens, the State of Oregon will fight it first. Young said the reason they are now going after it as a federal crime is because of interstate commerce. Sumpter's marijuana businesses are operating solely within the State of Oregon and in the City of Sumpter, not crossing state lines.

Linda Wise asked the status of the City shop building, which collapsed

from the snow last winter.

McKinney stated the City has the money from the insurance and the project can go out to bid and have construction started in the spring.

Woolf stated the City was paying insurance for a \$164,000 building and the insurance company is now saying the building was worth only \$84,000. After their deductible, the City received \$79,000, which Woolf placed into an interest-bearing account.

The insurance company also stated the City cannot put in a concrete floor as the building did not have one previously, and must put up a metal building as that is what was there before.

Woolf stated the insurance broker, though not the adjuster, lives in La Grande and has offered to come over after the ice subsides and help them understand the policy.

Clarke asked that meeting be set up so they can get the discussion going as to the discrepancy between what the City was paying and what the building was worth.

Public input

On behalf of the Sumpter Volunteers, Young thanked everyone who helped put up and take down the town tree.

Rowan thanked Heather Wilson for what she did with the Christmas bazaar, stating Sumpter had triple the vendors that they've ever had and she has heard nothing but positive comments.

Wilson stated there were so many who helped and it wasn't just her.

She announced there will be a preliminary meeting at the Schoolhouse January 25 at 6:30 for anyone who wants to help next year. Everyone is welcome.

Man menaces with hammer

BY KERRY McQUISTEN
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On Sunday, January 7, just around 9:35 p.m., Baker City Police were called to a residence at 2630 Resort Street, after a female victim in her early twenties called 911 to report that her husband was threatening her with a hammer.

According to information from Chief Wyn Lohner, Eric Wayne Sherman, age 40, "used a claw hammer to menace his wife Millicent Sherman and locked her in a bathroom to prevent her from leaving."

Officers Shannon Regan and Coleton Smith responded, and Sherman was arrested on Menacing and Kidnapping 2 charges, a felony with a mandatory prison sentence if convicted.

According to prior scanner traffic, police had responded to a late-night 911 call more than a year ago from the victim during which she accused Sherman of threatening to tear up the mattress and/or other belongings in her apartment with a knife. No arrests were made as a result of that call.



Photo courtesy of the Baker County Sheriff's Office

Eric Sherman.

5J evaluates facilities

The Baker School District's Long Range Facility Planning (LRFP) Committee hit an exciting milestone last month. On Wednesday, November 15, Committee members held an engaging, collaborative conversation around potential scenarios addressing the District's facility needs, including how each scenario might best serve the educational needs.

The LRFP Committee, formed in March 2017, consists of 24 community members and district staff representing a wide variety of Baker City's citizens.

The goal of the Committee is to build upon the work of the Facilities Master Planning (FMP) Committee by reviewing the FMP Committee's factual findings of the District's aging instructional buildings, addressing concerns about student and building capacity and safety, and crafting a vision of how to best deliver 21st century education in the Baker School District.

"Reviewing those results along with taking tours of our overly crowded, deteriorating schools, it is easy to conclude that our district needs to address serious issues and address them soon," said Beth Shirtcliff, LRFP committee member.

A wide variety of options were discussed in the November meeting, from renovations of existing buildings, to exploring possible new construction, and how to address the needs of the current facilities.

As part of the planning process, the Committee toured neighboring facilities, gaining insight into what regional communities have done to improve their educational delivery.

"One of the highlights was touring the Pendleton Early Learning Center," said Chris Knoll, committee member. "This beautiful facility was previously an elementary school, which has been completely renovated to deliver care and education from birth to kindergarten."

The Pendleton center collaborates with several agencies to deliver multiple services under one roof, including health care, mental health, family support, special education, WIC, childcare, Head Start, preschool and kindergarten.

"It would be great to bring a similar facility to Baker," Chris said.

The LRFP Committee meets again in December to continue discussions on viable solutions for the District with the intention to provide a comprehensive report to the Board of Directors in early 2018. It is expected that the Board will discuss possible next steps, specifically how to share LRFP Committee findings with the Baker community and engage a broader representation of citizens in this discussion.

The Baker 5J schools exist to be the center of community vitality eliminating the barriers for gratifying individual educational experiences in order to have capable contributing citizens with character.

"One of the things that I have particularly appreciated about serving on this committee is its consistent commitment to do what is best for the students and, at the same time, keep uppermost in our discussions the community's needs and financial means to meet those needs," said Richard Chaves, committee member.

The LRFP Committee has had several discussions about how to inform the community of the various facilities options.

"In my opinion, informing the community of school facilities options and student needs, combined with understanding what the community wants, provides the best opportunity for serving our students now and in the future," Richard said.

If you have any questions or comments regarding the LRFP Committee, or how to become involved in the process, please feel free to reach out to the District at 541-524-2260.

Lego robotics competition at EOU

Lego robots, programmed by teams of local young people, attempted to water plants, put out house fires, complete irrigation systems and replace broken pipes during the annual FIRST Lego League tournament at Eastern Oregon University last month.

More than a 100 participants, ages 9 to 14, compete in the tournament each year. They design robots using Lego bricks and program them to complete a series of tasks auto-

mously.

Computer science professor Robert Croft has been at the helm of EOU's tournament since its inaugural run in 2004.

Participants also build social and communication skills. The popular Robot Game is only one of four components each tournament includes. Teams also go head-to-head in Technical Judging, Project Judging and Core Values Judging. These categories feature a panel of pro-

fessionals who evaluate students' abilities to communicate effectively, think critically and creatively, and work as a team to solve real-world problems.

This year's tournament centered on hydrodynamics, and every aspect of competition touched on water use. Students proposed solutions to water shortages, selected locations for a new water treatment facility, and designed their robots to address various water-associated

tasks.

EOU professors from the College of Science, Technology, Mathematics & Health Science volunteered to judge presentations alongside local engineers and computer scientists. EOU students joined their professors in support of the tournament, helping set up, take down and referee the all-day event in Badgely Hall. Taylor Hunt, a junior studying mathematics at EOU, served as a referee.