

CityNews...

By Scott Laird

Council Adopts Budget, Administrator Kline Warns Situation Serious...

At a special city council session on June 25, 2007, Vernonia's city council voted to adopt the 2007-2008 budget with little fanfare. City Administrator M. R. "Dick" Kline confirmed that the city is in a "...serious financial situation..." because of a negative fund balance in the Community Development Fund and a shortage in Loan Reserves that legally needed to be restored. Kline presented a budget that was balanced using inter-fund loans from funds that have positive balances. Kline remained upbeat about Vernonia's ability to remain financially solvent through sound fiscal responsibility and a "...very tight budget..." over the next two years. Kline warned the council to expect adjustments to the budget through possible supplemental processes throughout the fiscal year as there may be unmet needs, particularly loan payments for Phase I of the wastewater treatment facility that are not budgeted.

Kline clarified that the Library Memorial Fund is being dissolved because it is not necessary, and that funds from that account will be used for library purchases, and are not going into the general fund to help balance the budget.

Kline stated that he hopes to have the city converted to a new chart of accounts by July 15. The software for the new chart of accounts is expected to cost the city less in operating costs and should allow for accurate reports to be available, making the city's financial situation more transparent. Mr. Kline later stated that he expects the additional information in the line items to be very helpful. Kline thanked all city employees and all city committee members for their work during the budget process.

At the July 2 regular city council meeting, Kline announced that he intends to call a town hall meeting or a press conference to clarify the budget deficit situation once all the facts are known.

Council Declares 20 Acres City property as Surplus...

The Vernonia city council declared a 20 acre parcel of property that is inside city limits and owned by the city to be surplus property, beginning the process that would make it available to be put up for sale. The city is researching the idea of selling the property after doing some initial development work. Mayor Sally Harrison stated that there has been interest expressed in the property by developers. The property was appraised a year ago at \$500,000. Kline suggested that the possible sale of city owned property is a good option to relieve some of the financial hardship the city faces, as this could add income and increase tax value and receipts; he recommends moving forward with this process. A public hearing is scheduled for July 16, 2007.

Council Approves Funds for Police Equipment...

At the City Council meeting on July 2, council approved by consensus a request from the Police Department for funds to purchase two new vehicles to replace aging vehicles in the fleet. The vehicles to be replaced are the 2001 Ford Crown Victoria, which is the K-9 unit, and the four wheel drive 1999 Chevy Suburban. These vehicles will be replaced with a 2007 Dodge Charger and a 2007 Ford Expedition. The expectation is that these new vehicles will save the city money in needed repairs as well as with fuel costs as both replacement vehicles are rated at higher miles-per-gallon averages. Both these vehicles will be equipped with new ICOPs technology which includes digital cameras for the front and rear that record actions in which the vehicle is involved, collision sensors that are activated and save data back in the event of a collision, radar recording, and an Emergency Assist Feature that can broadcast audio even if an officer is away from the vehicle. The ICOP's units are being purchased as part of a bulk purchase order among numerous other agencies, saving the city about \$1,000. City Administrator Kline states that funds for these purchases would come from the gen-

eral fund contingency and would leave that fund with a balance of between \$5,000- \$10,000 for the entire fiscal year. The Budget Committee had previously rejected a motion to add this purchase into this year's budget during the budget hearing process.

In Other City News...

At the June 18 City Council meeting, council approved an OLCC Limited On-Premises Sales application for Cafe' 47 at 845 Bridge Street. At the special June 25 City Council meeting, council approved a resolution changing building permit fees and approved a resolution increasing city parks' usage fees. At the July 2 City Council meeting, council approved a new Intergovernmental Agreement between the city and the Department of Administrative Services (DAS), allowing the city to utilize various DAS Motor Pool services; approved requests from the Jamboree Committee and from the Lion's Den concerning street and alley closures for Jamboree weekend; and approved the Police Department's listing of items in their possession and deemed them surplus property.

The council also received information concerning a conditional use permit request that was approved by Columbia County for a dog training and boarding operation at 15640 Airport Way. The property site is not under the city of Vernonia's jurisdiction but falls to the County for decisions. The City Parks Committee had expressed reservations about the proposed use which were forwarded on to Columbia County, and a presentation to city council by the applicant was canceled due to health issues and was not rescheduled. At the council meeting on July 2 it was made known that the opportunity to appeal the county's decision had already passed.

The city offered written responses to topics from the floor that had been raised and not responded to since January 2007.

Jamboree Committee Chair Randy Parrow announced that City Councilor Shirlee Daughtry has been named Citizen of the Year. This is the second time that Daughtry, a lifelong Vernonia resident, has received this honor.

Principal Keeps Job continued

in his position over our kids," said Jeanne Hill in an email sent out to community members. "Vernonia has worked very hard at getting drugs out of it's schools. We strongly feel that if he is allowed to "quietly" keep his job, that sends out a very wrong message to our kids."

"For those that disagree with my decision, I can say that there is private information as well as legal ramifications that they are probably not aware of," said Cox.

While the community has a very active and vocal Drug-Free Coalition, numerous parents within the district have expressed support for Miller citing his popularity and excellent communication with students and parents alike.

"I am delighted and so proud of Ken Cox's decision," said Rose Curtis, a parent of a Vernonia school student. "Mr. Miller made a stupid mistake, but we all have. I think Mr. Miller will use this as a lesson. Hopefully everyone will learn from this. I support him 110%."

Tabitha Shively a 16-year-old student said "Everyone makes mistakes. He [Miller] has given lots of kids a second chance. He is a role model, but I think he deserves one more chance."

At a special meeting on Wednesday, July 11 Dr. Cox resigned his position as Chairperson of the Drug-Free Coalition, stating "My responsibility is to the school district, not to the Coalition."

"My goal is for people to come to this community for the quality of the schools," Cox said in closing. "We're not there yet but my hope is that we get there soon. This has been a big set back for everyone's efforts here."

A Clatsop County court date has been set for Miller to appear August 6

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