

Council Approves First Reading of Adult Entertainment Ordinance

Before a standing room only crowd, The Vernonia City Council unanimously approved the first reading of an ordinance that would regulate adult entertainment within city limits. The council also approved first readings to adopt: a resolution establishing fees for licensing and operation of an entertainment facility; changes in the Light Industrial Zone; changes to an ordinance establishing adult entertainment facilities as a Conditional Use and adding the requirement of a Site Design Review; and changes to an ordinance concerning Public Indecency. All of these Ordinances, changes and resolutions must be read again and approved before they are adopted.

"Both City Council and the Planning Commission are committed to not only encouraging new business and economic diversity but maintain the livability and preserving the health, welfare, and safety of the community, a complex balancing act." said Planning Commissioner Heather Lewis, who spearheaded the creation of this ordinance. "This ordinance was created over the period of sixteen months after collecting, compiling and reviewing court cases, statistics from other cities, and public testimony. We took every measure to protect the interests of the community as well as provide protection of the constitutional rights of prospective businesses and employees."

The ordinance would restrict the locations available for an Adult Entertainment business by establishing distance guidelines from residential neighborhoods, other Adult Entertainment establishments, and schools. The Ordinance also places standards on licensing requirements and administration procedures. It also sets regulations for activities that could be conducted as part of a potential business establishment.

"We were very careful in how we constructed the ordinance," said Lewis. "It is multi-faceted in that the regulations are directed only at well documented secondary effects, while striving to maintain the constitutional rights of the applicants intact. Also, the supporting documents are all content neutral meaning that they do not single out adult businesses, and therefore are not discriminatory. We believe that all of the supporting documents will pass even the strictest scrutiny of the Oregon Appellate Court, as precedent has been set by city of Beaverton in 2000. The final draft of the ordinance itself might be challenged but was based on previous ordinances that passed scrutiny at both the ninth district court and Supreme Court levels."

There has been no opposition at the City Council or the two Planning Commission hearings. The second reading of the ordinance will take place on Monday November 5, 2007 at the Vernonia City Council Meeting.

VCLC Announces Mobile Poetry Wall

Vernonia Community Learning Center Gallery announces the addition of the mobile Poetry Wall and is seeking submissions for display of no longer than two pages per submission, with a total of no more than four pages or equivalent size from people of all ages. No prior publication experience is necessary. All styles and subjects encouraged.

Submissions can be submitted by e-mail to vclc@vernonia-or.gov, by mail, or dropped off in person by November 27. Call or e-mail with questions.

Vernonia Community Learning Center
939 Bridge Street
Vernonia, OR 97064
(503) 429-0898

Kline's Q & A

Vernonia City Administrator M.R. "Dick" Kline has been on the job for more than a year. In that time he has been working to simplify and clarify the city budget while untangling a web of personnel, financial and administrative issues that he inherited with his permanent position here. In order to facilitate better communication with local citizens, as well as a higher profile and more accessibility, Mr. Kline and Vernonia's Voice have agreed to provide space for citizen questions, with answers provided by your City Administrator, Dick Kline. Vernonia's Voice will start things off this first month with a question that seems to be on the minds of a lot of citizens about city personnel.

Q: The City of Vernonia recently changed job descriptions for office personnel and replaced a popular city employee, City Recorder Kate Conley. Early in your administration you also relieved the city finance clerk of her duties. The city has been without a Public Works Director for well over two years. What is going on with the city employees, and why have there been so many changes in such a short period of time?

First of all, I'd like to thank the Vernonia's Voice for the opportunity to speak to vital community issues in this column. Since the inception of your newspaper you have been genuinely professional in your approach to covering news at city hall and sincere in your efforts to learn the facts before publishing opinions and/or editorials. You are genuinely committed to reporting the news versus creating it.

In response to your question, the simple reasons for the staff changes at City Hall are money and priorities. The City has worked itself into an unsustainable financial position, and significant changes were required to operate within budget while addressing the new needs and challenges facing the City. Improved internal financial controls are being implemented to further safeguard the public's funds, and personnel dollars have been "freed up" permitting the City to maintain a five person police department. Providing effective public safety and secure financial services are two of the main objectives of any City's general fund.

Regarding the lengthy absence of a Public Works Director, again look at the financial condition of the utility departments. Last year a \$12/month loan repayment fee was implemented in the Sewer Fund to fund loan payments for sewer system planning. This year an \$11.50/month water loan reserve fee was implemented to rebuild contractually obligated loan reserves in the Water Fund. Next year the City will face an additional loan repayment schedule in the Sewer Fund that could add \$15-20/month to the average residential utility bill. After that, the City must comply with environmental quality requirements in Phase II of the sewer project and millions of dollars of storm water, water, and road projects just to achieve a minimum acceptable urban standard. Simply put, there is no money available for more staff in the face of these huge debt obligations and infrastructure capital needs.

It is unfortunate that most of the financial news regarding the City of Vernonia is bleak. For the last year the City Council, appointed committees, and staff have worked tirelessly to get our arms around the significance and complexity of these issues so that we can chart a logical course for the future. Significant progress has been made to this end, but additional hard work and increased co-operation is needed to truly achieve success. I am hopeful that this community can refocus its attention and energy on the real issues facing the community and that success is obtained in the near future.

If you have a question you would like to ask of City Administrator Dick Kline, please send them to:

Vernonia's Voice - Kline's Q&A
PO Box 55
Vernonia, OR 97064

- or -

Email news@vernoniasvoice.com
with the subject "Kline's Q and A".

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