

CityNews...

At the November 27 City Council Meeting:

Waste Water and Storm Water Assessment Completed

Works regular committee meeting on November 27, the committee heard a report from Dale Merrill, a civil engineer with Land Design Group. Mr. Merrill reported on the state of the city's Waste and Storm Water systems, a study Merrill had agreed to do free of charge for the city, and on which he spent almost forty hours of time.

Merrill's report did not offer much good news for the city, but did offer a number of suggestions to help right the situation. Merrill also offered encouragement that the city's issues were not insurmountable, and also not unusual. "Vernonia is not the only city with utility problems," stated Merrill.

Merrill noted that the city is without master plans for its waste water and storm water systems. He also noted the lack of rate studies. He laid out a plan for establishing operational costs, and some suggested steps to help the city gain a more comprehensive understanding of its utility needs.

Merrill recommended the following action steps:

- Contact DEQ to ask for additional considerations given the cities circumstances
- Complete a comprehensive rate study of the city waste water system
- Develop master plans for both the waste water and storm water systems

Merrill also offered the following suggestions:

- Don't do any thing else with the waste water system until the above action steps are complete
- Upgrade the current water master plan that the city already has, to include water storage
- Begin collecting a depreciation account in a reserve fund to make future needed upgrades and major repairs
- Develop and implement a maintenance management plan
- Try to spread out the debt load, it is currently too heavy

Merrill explained that each of the rate studies could expect to take at least six months. He also offered that the city may want to consider selling the water utilities to a private company.

"This is not a problem that has developed overnight," explained Merrill. "The city of Vernonia has gotten into this over the last twenty-five years. The city has not paid attention to the way it has operated these utilities."

At the December 17 City Council Meeting:

City Administrator Kline Recommends Changes to City Leadership

Citing the recent floods and the expected financial impact the recovery process will entail, current City Administrator Dick Kline recommended that City Council approve a plan to combine the salary of the City Administrator and the funds paid to contracted City Planner Aldie Howard, and split the amount between the two. Under this plan Mr. Howard would assume the role as interim City Administrator and handle Flood Recovery, while Mr. Kline would concentrate on financial issues and Public Works. Both Howard and Kline would become contract employees, meaning Kline will give up his city benefits package. Kline stated, "This city is in a financial crisis, and needs to spend its money on flood recovery. This is the right thing to do." Councilor Randy Parrow requested an emergency session to allow all Councilors to be present to discuss and decide the issue. Council later approved these changes at that Emergency meeting.

No Decision Made on Remote Control Planes at Airport

City Council tabled a vote on allowing remote control airplanes at the Vernonia Municipal Airport. Councilor Randy Parrow suggested waiting due to the absence of Councilor Steve Whiteman, who is the council liaison to the Airport Committee.

Changes Made to Office Staff Job Descriptions

City Council approved changes to the job description for the Administrative and Financial Services Assistant, adding the title and duties of Human Resources Coordinator. According to City Administrator M.R. "Dick" Kline, the move is intended to provide for a team of cross-trained, multi-tasking employees, and also provide for human resource functions to be assigned to an employee in confidentiality.

Is There A Doctor In The House? A Message From Vernonia Mayor Sally Harrison

Why yes, there most certainly is a doctor in the house – a doctor *and* a top-notch medical staff!

The City of Vernonia would like to send a special thank you to Dr. Phyllis Gilmore and her staff at Providence Medical Center. Dr. Gilmore has been Vernonia's medical doctor since 2004 and has always given "her all" to this community. The hours and days following the flood were no exception. Dr. Gilmore lost no time setting up temporary medical services at the Fire Station, remaining open from morning to night throughout the weekend flowing the flood; then establishing much needed MASH tents on clinic property in Vernonia. And in just two weeks time – Dr. Gilmore and staff are back in business in their reconstructed offices on Bridge Street.

Well, here we are again, dear friends and neighbors. What can I possibly say that you haven't already heard or thought? An awful mess! Who would have ever thought this would happen again so soon. Wasn't it supposed to be a 100 year flood in '96? Well, believe me, we won't believe the hype and we aren't going to grow complacent again.

When thinking of what can be done, some of the solution words I've heard are: raising, moving, diking, dredging, funneling, and damming. Not very technical terminology but words I can understand.

The next step is to get the experts, engineers, hydrologists, geologists, etc. who can come up with the plans that will bring about the multi-layered solutions we need.

Here is where your elected officials local, county, state and national will help us. We need funding for the planning and the implementation. We need solutions that will pass the test of time. We won't forget what has happened.

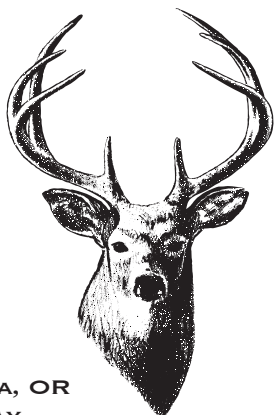
Your council is hard at work restructuring City Hall. This is the time to have the expertise we need in the best positions so we get the most efficiency from our limited funds.

Ideas are being brought forward for evaluation. Hopefully this next six months will be innovative, creative and productive.

I promise to keep you posted on the progress on both fronts. Keep the faith. We are a community of the finest, most resilient folks in the world.

'Til next time,
Sally

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