

A Conversation with Tony Hyde

By Scott Laird

Columbia County Commissioner and Vernonia resident Tony Hyde is one of the hardest working people in the County. He has been extremely active in the county flood recovery effort for the last eight months. He was appointed by Governor Kulongoski as Co-convenor of the Oregon Solutions Vernonia Schools Project that is working to find a new site and funding for a new school campus for the local district. He sits on over twenty boards and commissions, many of them based on economic development. He is one of the most knowledgeable people anywhere about the timber industry, and he has been active in organizing and running the Vernonia Logging Show for the past thirty years. Although he is supposed to be in the middle of a re-election campaign, how could he possibly find the time to campaign?

Vernonia's Voice recently sat down with Commissioner Tony Hyde to talk about the condition of the logging industry, cuts in county funding and running for re-election in the middle of recovery from a major disaster. The following are excerpts from that conversation.

"We have some real problems in the logging industry all happening at once. Mills are shutting down at the same time as the slow down in the housing industry has happened. It's having a real ripple effect. Boise Cascade and Longview Fiber are cutting back on production. We have to try to find ways to turn that around. The logging industry is hurting right now. These are tough times, no doubt about it, so we need to be looking at alternative uses."

"I think the industry can be more viable. I am still encouraged. We can find ways to utilize what we have. We are on the edge of finding ways to make ethanol from forest by-products - wood chips, grasses, things not used - and turn them into energy. There are some really good possible uses there."

"There is also the idea of Carbon Sequestration which can be a way to really quantify the value of trees. We have issues with warming in the environment, that is a fact, and we are releasing carbon into the system in a number of different ways. When forests burn, they release carbon. There is also a release of carbon when we let our forests rot. When we harvest trees, there is no release of carbon. It is valuable to have forests, but we also have to manage them. We need to promote that trees are carbon-eating machines. That can be a way to stimulate the industry."

"Fifty-two percent of our state lands are in federal ownership, and the loss of federal timber funds has not only hurt Columbia County, it's hurt a number of other counties. And it may have a domino effect throughout the state. We are facing a real crisis. We are losing fifty-eight dollars per student statewide with the failure of congress to reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools program. That means Columbia County is losing twenty-three percent of its discretionary budget. We will be able to forestall the inevitable this year by using some one-time funding we have from the sale of assets. But we are still on death row; we just got ourselves a stay of execution."

"A number of counties are facing insolvency. The counties are the delivery point for a majority of state services including Health and Community Services, Public Safety and Judicial Services, Economic Development, Transportation, and Land Use. The counties are already carrying a heavy burden. There are no easy answers without funding."

"The federal government has an obligation to harvest their forests and share that income with the state. That was the plan that was developed - the Northwest Timber Harvest Plan, or the so-called "Clinton Harvest Plan." It is a binding document and was designed to buy us time to figure out other ways to get value from our forests. But they are sitting on it and letting it rot and burn. Production of 800 million board feet would be sustainable. Last year they cut 200 million board feet. The Fed's are out of compliance, and it is having a direct effect on the counties' ability to do business."

"I have been too busy to fund raise this year for my re-election campaign. We have serious issues in this county. We have flood recovery and mitigation. We need to find ways to get people out of harm's way in the event of another event like last year. We

have infrastructure like water and sewer systems that needs to be replaced or repaired in every city in the county. And all of this is happening in an election year. But I'm working to get my campaign in full swing."

"I couldn't do what I do without the support of my wife Dana. I call her 'the county's biggest asset.' And she always reminds me when I start feeling too self-important that I'm still the one who takes out the garbage and cleans the toilet!"

High School Gym To Be Back In Business

The first phase of the long process on the road to recovery for the Vernonia School District and for the community as a whole has already started and should be in full swing by the time you read this article.

Beginning July 24, 2008, demolition of the high school began! Rod McDowell of Milstead & Associates, Project Manager for Vernonia School District's current planned construction projects, said preparation for siting of the modular classroom building should be complete. The modular, donated by Blazer Industries in Portland, will be used by fifth grade classes. This modular will be sited at Washington Grade School. The existing three modular classrooms located behind the high school and middle schools will be demolished at the same time that site prep is completed for the donated modular classroom.

Progress also began for demolition of the high school building. The east wing classroom portion of the school will be torn down first. The structure remaining will be the stage, gym and shower facilities, along with the existing front office. This building will be remodeled to serve as a sports center to serve the community and the school.

It is expected that that the gymnasium project will be up and running, if not in time for the beginning of school then by the end of September. Mr. McDowell said, "Milstead & Associates is doing everything in their power to get the school buildings open in time for start of school. We're focusing on getting the modular in place, and doing everything we can to meet the District's and students' needs, including whatever cost savings can be worked in, including using volunteers to save the District money."

Speaking of volunteers, Sally Harrison, Mayor of the City of Vernonia, spoke at the City Council meeting on July 21, 2008 regarding the opportunity for the community to be involved in helping the district save money as well as put the gym back together. Tony Hyde, Columbia County Commissioner, along with Mrs. Harrison, is working towards setting up a "sheetrock party" for putting up the sheetrock in the remodeled gym complex. US Gypsum in Rainier donated drywall, not just for the community members affected by the flood, but for the gym as well! You are invited to come help put up drywall - no experience necessary - the week of August 7th. Call (503) 429-4948 and speak with Robb Wilson to get more details about how to participate. Details can also be found at Vernonia School District, Vernonia City Hall, Columbia County Flood Relief Center (The Vernonia Community Learning Center), as well as on their websites, www.vernonia-or.gov and www.vernoniaflood.com.

Flag Thefts A Problem

The City of Vernonia has experienced a rash of flag thefts during recent weeks. The American flag and Oregon State flags were both stolen from outside city hall. The American flag was also stolen from Vernonia Lake Park, and a private citizen reported damage to a flag on their property.

Anyone with any information regarding these acts of vandalism and theft should contact the Vernonia Police Department at 503-429-7335.

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Notice of Public Meeting Columbia County Hazard Mitigation Plan

Wednesday, August 13, 2008

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is providing technical assistance to Columbia County to facilitate the update of our existing natural hazards mitigation plan to a multi-jurisdictional hazard mitigation plan. The following jurisdictions have designated steering committees, completed the hazard screening process, and gathered data to analyze the risk associated with the hazards affecting the people and property in the following jurisdictions: Columbia County, St. Helens, Columbia City, Scappoose, Clatskanie, Rainier, Prescott, and Vernonia.

All interested parties are encouraged to attend one of the three informational sessions presenting the results of the risk assessment. This opportunity for public participation is designed to describe: the planning process to date; natural and technological hazards identified to occur in your community; people and property at risk from each hazard; goals your community wants to achieve; and mitigation actions or projects your community can implement to reduce or mitigate the risks associated with the hazards.

Date: Wednesday, August 13, 2008

Location: C911CD
58611 McNulty Way
St. Helens, OR 97051

Times: 10:00 am, 2:00 pm or 6:00 pm

Please contact Frank Hupp or Vicki Harguth in Columbia County Emergency Management with any questions at 503-366-3930.