

Oregon Solutions to Find School Issue Answers

The team went on to discuss the importance of managing expectations and showing patience through the process. "There is a lot going on, and a lot that needs to be done," said team member State Senator Betsy Johnson.

"I am a believer in under-promising and then over-delivering," said Oregon US Congressman David Wu who was visiting the meeting. "You need to be honest with people about what it will take to build this project," he added.

The following are some key issues that the team discussed at the August 8th meeting, all which need some form of resolution before designs can be considered.

Choosing the Site - The Siting Committee has determined that the City of Vernonia must expand its Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) if either of the two new sites the team has identified as potential locations (at the top of OA Hill behind Spencer Park or the top of Corey Hill) can be considered - a process that could take as long as four to six months to complete. Some zoning adjustments to city held properties, some county population growth estimates and a buildable lands inventory may all need to be completed before the State Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) will allow any expansion of the UGB. The team expressed confidence during the August 8th meeting that the political will exists to accomplish this expansion, and a Siting subcommittee that includes Interim City Administrator Jim Johnson and City Planning Commissioner Chair Dan Brown was tasked with expediting this process.

What Will Be Included? - The possibility of including some expanded or enriched learning programs and some partner facilities on the site of the new campus is being researched by a Co-location Committee. A school-based health clinic - an idea that is being used on campuses nationwide - is one possible partner. Creating opportunities to get students more engaged in learning by creating a vocational or professional preparation learning tract is another possibility. The Oregon Solutions team has begun preliminary discussions with institutions of higher learning including Oregon State University and Portland Community College that could be partners in programs. One idea is Natural Resource Studies that could include Forestry Studies or Watershed/Wetlands Management programs using adjacent properties as living classrooms. Another possibility is a Police/Fire/ Public Safety program. These types of collaborations have been shown to

improve student test scores, increase support and funding potential, and could help make Vernonia a school of choice, not just of convenience. It could be necessary for a vision to be clarified and decisions about what programs would be included before a design is implemented.

Costs and Financing - The Budget Committee is currently projecting costs to build a new campus at \$35 to \$50 million dollars using some very basic calculations. They are looking at other recent school construction projects in order to develop an actual expected budget. The idea that Vernonia students and the community should not have to settle for less is being balanced against the idea that this project needs to create a functional and affordable design. There have been initial conversations with a high level professional fundraiser who may be willing to offer pro bono assistance to help develop a fundraising campaign. But before funders can be approached, a design needs to be created. It is still expected that Vernonia citizens will have to help fund part of this project themselves.

In the Mean Time - Vernonia School District Superintendent Ken Cox reported he expects the district will have lost seventy to one hundred students this school year. That amounts to a loss of between \$400,000 and \$500,000 in state funding each year. In order to keep its athletic programs going, Cox and the School board have decided to repair the high school gymnasium, at a cost of \$600,000 - a minimum fix that will allow the gym to be used for three to four years after which time it will need to be torn down. The cost has been held down in part because the project will use donated sheet rock with the community being invited to participate in helping with construction during "community work parties." The school board has looked at numerous alternatives, and this appears to be the most feasible and cost effective. Oregon Solution team members are concerned, especially school board member Jim Krahn, that this temporary fix and costs may not sit well with community members. Will keeping basketball, volleyball and physical education programs alive help keep more families in the district? Only time will tell.

Given the circumstances, with so many factors needing to be considered and so many details to work out, it appears the Oregon Solutions team is moving forward about as quickly as possible. Progress is being made, resources are being brought on board and partnerships are being formed. For some citizens, it just may not be fast enough.

Vernonia Town Hall Meeting Helps Get Information to the Public

By Scott Laird

The first in a series of Town Hall Meetings was held in Vernonia on August 19. The meeting was a public information meeting and focused on flood recovery, steps being taken to repair and rebuild Vernonia Schools and what is being done to help get people back in their homes.

Ken Cox, Superintendent of the Vernonia School District, reported on the progress of the Oregon Solutions Project which is working to help find a new location for a school campus, on progress to repair the high school gymnasium and on demolition of parts of the existing building. Current plans call for a temporary fix on the gym, allowing it to be used for athletic events for a couple of years until a new gymnasium is built.

The meeting also heard from staff from the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) who reported on the Transportation Growth Management (TGM) study currently under way.

This study will give the district and the Oregon Solutions team needed information about potential site locations, infrastructure installation, utilities, and roads that will be needed, and they will assist the city in possible future growth.

Jim Tierney addressed the meeting and discussed the work of the Columbia County Flood Relief. Tierney talked about the over 70,000 hours of logged volunteer time the relief group has recorded, valued at over \$2,180,000 by FEMA, which can be used as a match towards FEMA assistance. He also discussed the assistance the flood relief center has given to local residents by managing flood recovery and unmet needs in the absence of a city government prepared to fill this role: by educating the community about flood recovery and available assistance; by securing and managing aid funding, donations, and repair work through volunteer organizations; and by working to secure an expected \$3 million in grants and aid including \$350,000 in

cash donations. These funds will be used to put together projects to help homeowners with repairs and restorations, raising of homes and buyouts to move homeowners out of the flood plain.

Dan Brown, Chair of the Vernonia Planning Commission and who has been managing local flood relief, then spoke about the process the home owners will go through and how a project is put together for both raising a home and a buyout. The process is complicated for both involving about eight to ten steps which has resulted in delays for some homeowners. Brown and Tierney both reiterated that each home project has unique characteristics and needs to be put together on an individual basis.

Although flood recovery has been slow, the meeting stressed that progress is being made. Ten months after the flood, many home projects have been completed or are about to get started.

An Opinion: Measures 5-190 and 5-191 - Wrong Fix at the Wrong Time

By Jim Tierney

I have been lucky enough to be able to work at the interface between the public and private sectors for twenty-five years. I would like to believe that my deep curiosity about how government really works shows through in my work and volunteer life. It is through the lens of this experience that I see the distracted impact of Columbia County ballot measures 5-190 and 5-191.

Wayne Mayo, the sponsor of these initiatives, is a Columbia County contractor. As a nonprofit developer myself, I have also noticed the influx of Spanish-speaking workers on jobs sites. I can imagine Mayo's frustration at losing work to contractors using workers who do not appear to be local. I, too, would be desperate to exert some control over my livelihood. However, my sympathy for Mayo does not cloud my understanding of the extreme cost or uselessness of these measures.

The ballot initiative system is like a sharp knife. If wielded carefully, it is a wonderful tool. However, in unskilled or unscrupulous hands, that knife can wound. Measures 5 - 190 and 5 - 191 demonstrate the author's lack of skill. These measures are poorly conceived and badly written. They will cost taxpayers and businesses much money without delivering any benefits.

These measures:

- Set up the County for an inevitable lawsuit since there appears to have been no effort to dovetail with state law. For example, the measures require the county to issue \$10,000 fines despite Oregon statutes that limit their authority to \$1,000 fines. Don't believe claims that these laws have worked elsewhere. At great expense, they have gummed up the court

systems where they've been passed.

- Force the Sheriff's Office to cut back already scarce rural patrols. We could have deputies policing worksites rather than patrolling our rural roads to help at accidents, breakdowns and crime scenes.
- Will require our County Attorney to waste her limited resources defending the county against an inevitable lawsuit, and hold our commissioners hostage in useless and unnecessary hearings. The measures will divert them from productive work including needed cost cutting and job creation.
- Will put business owners at risk of losing their businesses if they are not skillful at discerning forged documents.

These measures are the wrong fix at the wrong time. The County General fund has lost 25% of its revenue (federal timber payments.) Our county needs jobs badly; these anti-business measures will hurt job creation. We can't afford this.

Like Mr. Mayo, I believe in enforcing the law. I am frustrated that our federal and state governments toyed with hard-working Americans and hard-working immigrants as long as they have. Fortunately, that has changed. Enforcement actions are up, and at least 1.3 million (11%) illegal immigrants have returned home. August 2007 was the peak.

Mr. Mayo wants you and me to pay for his experiment to solve his problem. Let's not. Vote "No" on Measures 5 - 190 and 5 - 191 in November.