

CityNews...

City Council November 3, 2008

Police No Longer Providing Courtroom Services...

The Vernonia Police have notified Columbia County that, due to budget constraints and manpower issues, effective November 1, 2008, Vernonia Police will no longer be able to provide Courtroom Security and Bailiff Services for Vernonia Justice Court. Interim Police Chief Mike Kay noted that his department would still be available to respond to emergencies involving district court.

VCLC Lease to Flood Relief Ending...

The City of Vernonia and Columbia County will be ending their agreement for rental office space for Columbia County Flood Relief (CCFR). The Oregon Community Block Grant Program has informed the City of Vernonia that its change in use in regards to the Vernonia Community Learning Center, from an educational community center to flood relief, does not meet the requirements for the grant. CCFR has voluntarily agreed to relocate and terminate its lease.

Sludge Removal Completed...

The City of Vernonia has completed the removal of sludge from the sewer lagoons. The project was initiated in response to damage caused by flood waters last December. Interim City Manager Jim Johnson, reported that the project was completed in scheduled time and was under budget. Johnson thanked city engineer Dale Merrill for overseeing the project, and finding funds to complete it.

City Council November 17, 2008

Council Gives Go-Ahead for Another CDBG...

The City of Vernonia held a public hearing to take comment on its plans to apply for a \$500,000 Community Development Block Grant to improve public facilities and houses. Jim Tierney, from Columbia County Flood Relief (CCFR) presented a report, explaining that the grant will be used to match FEMA money for assisting homeowners who were affected by flooding last year. Tierney explained that grant funds are specifically for buyouts, and that CCFR is requesting from the State and County, that rental properties and businesses be eligible for buyouts, which was not the case previously. The City staff report stated that the project is estimated to benefit at least twenty-five persons of whom eighty percent will be low or moderate income. There were no comments in favor or opposed to the grant application. Council approved the application.

Council Hears Report on GIS...

Council held a work session and heard from city staff Seth Lenearts, about the new Global Information System that the city is developing. Lenearts explained that the new system is a mapping system, which can be used as a database of information. The system has the ability to overlay groups of information over maps, and is a very efficient way of looking and working with information. Lenearts explained that the system has multiple uses and will benefit the city with increased data storage, record-keeping, efficiency, and studying patterns of information. Ben Fousek, of KLS Surveying, who is managing the development of project for the city, explained the practical uses of the system. He also explained that they have begun mapping city utilities, and hope to have the system

operational, beginning next year. Some of the information will eventually be available to the public online. "The possibilities are endless with GIS," said Fousek. Fousek is asking for public input and ideas of how council and community residents would like to see this system used.

Council Discusses Urban Renewal Districts...

At the request of the Vernonia Economic Development Committee, the Vernonia City Council held a work session to discuss Urban Renewal Districts, and their possible uses in Vernonia. Interim City Administrator Jim Johnson presented a report, explaining the workings and uses, and the pros and cons of Urban Renewal.

Council Discusses Communication Issues...

At the request of Interim City Administrator Jim Johnson, council discussed communication with staff, and discussed with Mayor Sally Harrison, her communication style. Councilor Cindy Ball requested that Harrison bring items before council before she takes actions. Ball specifically raised concerns about Harrison's involvement with development at the Vernonia Airport, and a plan Harrison has proposed about voluntary parking meters in downtown Vernonia that would raise money for local non-profits and charities. Harrison defended her actions and statements so far, stating she made no promises to anyone about the airport, and was only exploring ideas about parking meters, not committing the city to any action. She did agree that her enthusiasm for certain topics may at times be interpreted as speaking for the council. Councilor Steve Whiteman reminded the Council that the only time they have any power is while in session. Johnson suggested that ideas be vetted with council before any exploratory work be undertaken.

From Our Elected Officials

By Vernonia Mayor Sally Harrison

When Scott approached me about writing an article with the one year anniversary of "The Flood" in mind, I said, "Oh, sure, I can do that." But, the more I sat and contemplated the past year the harder it was to formulate my thoughts. What can I possibly say about you wonderful people who have shared the same devastation and are not only still standing but finding ways to rebuild and somehow, somehow making our town a better place to live?

I think we sometimes take our courage for granted. What is courage? Well, it's not the absence of fear, frustration, doubt and sadness. It's the ability to go forward in spite of it all.

There is a popular belief that if you visualize your dreams and desires, they are more likely to materialize to the end. I'd like to share some of my dreams for Vernonia in the coming years.

- Beautiful new school's in a safe place. Not just new buildings, but a school with new and inventive methods of providing our kids with the best education they can get.
- A new, low cost (how about free) way of moving our sewer lagoons and finally get out from under the DEQ mandates.
- Pursuing all possibilities, all avenues to try and control the amount of flood water that comes our way next time. Whether, that would include replacing the dam on Rock Creek or the use of outlet channels or possibly both. I truly believe this is a doable project. Not quick and easy but doable.
- I see pockets of businesses that provide family wage jobs, along with the building upon the businesses we already have so they can be sustainable.
- The completion of both the Bike Skills Park and Skate Board Venue.
- A new Senior Center! These long suffering hard working citizens deserve a new place.
- My vision, for Vernonia is to maintain its quaint, friendly atmosphere. A place where "City Folk" will love to come and get away from their own hectic hubbub. Maybe, a Drive-in Movie, Community Gardens, Bike Races, Concerts? Where do you stop dreaming?

I say yes, the past year has been hard, but I also see such hope for beautiful prosperous times ahead. So, please, brave souls, come and dream along with me.

Vernonia Vandalism Turns Ugly

By Scott Laird

Vernonia has experienced a recent outbreak of graffiti and vandalism that has left citizens, officials and police deeply disturbed, and a number of local youth and young adults in trouble with the law.

Incidents of vandalism on October 11th, 18th, and 31st left graffiti damage to Vernonia school property, city parks property and the Vernonia Scout Cabin. The graffiti included references to violent video games, racist symbols, derogatory comments about school teachers, pornographic images, and threats against local police officers.

"The juveniles who drew the swastikas knew exactly what they meant," said Interim Vernonia Police Chief Mike Kay, expressing concern about the seriousness of these incidents.

Vernonia Mayor Sally Harrison expressed disappointment. "Graffiti, hate, and destruction have no place in our community."

Damage to Anderson Park was valued at \$3,362; to the school buildings at \$1,000; and to the Scout Cabin at \$800.

According to Chief Kay, tips from local youth led to the immediate apprehension on October 31 of four juveniles and two adults involved in the most recent incidents on Halloween night. In addition, four youth were apprehended in the earlier incidents. All have been charged.

Chief Kay praised the youth who came forward to assist police, and the Vernonia Police officers involved for their quick response in locating, identifying, and apprehending the perpetrators within thirty minutes of the crimes being reported.

The two adults who were apprehended on October 31-- a nineteen-year-old female, Kesha Morgan, from Vernonia, and an eighteen-year-old-male, Devon Mezyk, no address given-- have been charged with criminal mischief in the first degree. The female was also charged with interfering with a police officer. The four youth involved-- all males, aged thirteen through fifteen-- have also been charged with criminal mischief.

According to Chief Kay, Oregon state law allows parents to be held responsible for actions involving underage children. A charge of "Failure to Supervise a Juvenile" is punishable by a \$1,000 fine.

"We are not going to stand for this," said Chief Kay.

Mayor Harrison echoed her Police Chief. "We are not going to tolerate this anymore," said Harrison. "I want the people involved to know there are consequences. A lot of people have worked hard to make this community better, and our hard work is worth something."

Graffiti of this nature has been linked to gangs. Chief Kay said he thought the adults involved had been recruiting the youth. "I don't think we have a gang problem," said Kay. "I think we had one starting, but we had an early intervention. We have the same problems every other community has. We're just trying to take a proactive stand to it."

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