

CityNews...

City Council December 2, 2008

New Councilor Resigns Position on Planning Commission...

Newly-elected City Councilor Kevin Hudson submitted a letter of resignation for his position on the Vernonia Planning Commission.

Mayor Discusses Flood Control with State Water Board...

Vernonia Mayor Sally Harrison, along with Interim City Administrator Jim Johnson and Upper Nehalem Watershed Director Maggie Peyton, met with officials from the Oregon Resources Board to discuss floodwater control and damage mitigation. "It sounds very hopeful," reported Harrison, in regards to beginning exploring possible solutions that could include outlet channels, re-establishing a dam on Rock Creek, and establishing models for flooding from the headwaters to the city. Mayor Harrison said the next meeting with the Water Board would involve the Army Corps of Engineers and representatives from Governor Kulongoski's office.

Interim Police Chief Reports on Vandalism and Presents New Forms...

Interim Police Chief Mike Kay reported on the State Statute 163.577 concerning Failure to Supervise a Child. Kay reported that parents or guardians of children under fifteen years of age, can be held accountable for a minor's actions. Kay reported that seven citations have been handed out under this statute. Failure to Supervise a Child is punishable by a \$497 fine for each parent of the child. Kay also introduced a number of new reporting forms that officers will be using, including a Juvenile Notice, that will be given to guardians for youth who have contact with police; a Building Check card, which will allow police to document when they have done courtesy checks for businesses; an Abandoned Auto Sticker, to give owners notice that a vehicle has been marked to be towed; a Dog Owner Service Card, that notifies owners that a complaint has been recorded about their pet; an Evidence Sheet that has been updated; Traffic Violation Warning form, in order to track and document that warnings have been given; and a Vehicle Impound form that will document personal items involved in the impound. The department will also offer fingerprinting cards for children that will be provided to parents as a service in case of emergencies. Kay also discussed Nuisance Abatement ordinance enforcement. Kay reported that his department is actively perusing eleven cases of Nuisance Abatement, and described new forms the department has to record violations, and the process for handling these cases.

Council Readopts Airport Plan and Adopts Rates and Fees...

City Council has re-adopted a Conceptual Airport Layout Plan, that, according to Interim City Administrator Jim Johnson, was originally presented in January of 2001, and describes existing and proposed locations of buildings and facilities,

and includes plans for a runway extension. The Council also adopted the Schedule of Rates and Fees that was presented, which is the policy framework for fees that may be charged. The Airport Committee will return to Council with specific recommendations for items in the document.

Council Gives OK to Purchase Property...

City Council gave Interim City Administrator Jim Johnson authorization to acquire a 30,000 square foot lot off Birch Street for \$1. The Property is currently owned by the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, and is in the flood zone. The property cannot be developed, but, according to Johnson, may be available for use as a community garden, open space or other similar use.

Council Amends Sewer and Water Fees...

City Council amended Resolution 14-08, stating that each water account in the city will be required to pay the \$2 parks fee, and that each sewer account will be required to pay the \$12 sewer loan reserve fund charge, even when there is no service at the account.

Legal Council Notifies Vernonia They May Have To Enforce County Initiative...

Columbia County voters approved Initiative 5-190 in November, that bans businesses from hiring illegal immigrants. Vernonia Legal Council Jeff Bennett informed City Council that according to Oregon State Statute 203.040, townships can be required by the county to enforce the initiative. It was originally believed that the initiative only concerned those areas in the county that were unincorporated; but, because Vernonia voters, along with St. Helens and Scappoose, approved the initiative in their precincts, it now appears that individual townships could be required to uphold the requirements of the new law. Vernonia's legal council is continuing to study the initiative and is considering testing the reading of the statute in a lawsuit. The initiative is currently in effect.

City Council December 15, 2008

City Accepts Election Results...

The City Council accepted final certified election results presented by the Columbia County Clerk, for Vernonia offices, which indicated that Sally Harrison received 548 votes for Mayor; and for City Council, Kevin Hudson received 436, Mike Seager 324, and Randy Parrow 529. The top two City Council candidates will begin serving starting in January, 2009.

City Extends DADS Recycling...

Council agreed to allow DADS Recycling to continue operations at its current location, for three more months, while owners Sandy and Allen Dewebber continue to relocate. Council has asked Interim City Administrator Jim Johnson to check with DEQ to confirm that there are no issues with DADS continuing to operate, as their location is in the Flood Way, and could be a hazard in the case of a high-water event.

Police Discuss Two Incidents...

Vernonia Interim Police Chief Mike Kay reported on two recent incidents in the community within twenty-four hours of each other. The first involved a violent domestic assault and attempted rape on Timber Road on December 5, which ended in the surrender of Dan Dunmire in Gresham. The second involved an armed individual, Otis Armes on Alder Street, which resulted in a six-hour standoff, and involved the multi-agency county Community Incident Response Team (CIRT). Chief Kay reported that the standoff ended peacefully, and with the safe removal of Armes' five year old son, who was in the home during the standoff.

Kay also reported that Vernonia would be sending an officer to attend funeral services for two Oregon police officers killed in the line of duty in Woodburn, Oregon, when a bomb exploded.

City Moving Forward on Urban Renewal Analysis...

City Council authorized Interim City Administrator Jim Johnson to identify grant funds that would be needed to proceed with an Urban Renewal Feasibility Analysis, and an Urban Renewal Plan and Report. Johnson reported there were no General Funds available in the city budget to fund this.

Council Hears First Reading of Ordinance Related to Dangerous Buildings...

City Council approved the first reading of a new ordinance concerning unsafe buildings, clarifying what is considered an unsafe building. An unsafe building is described in the ordinance as any building that constitutes a hazard by reason of "...inadequate maintenance, dilapidation, obsolescence, fire hazard, disaster, damage or abandonment..." The Ordinance states, "All such unsafe buildings... are declared public nuisances and shall be abated by repair, rehabilitation, demolition, or removal..." It goes on to offer the city the option of alternative actions that would prevent, restrain, correct or abate the violation. The Ordinance also adopts the "Uniform Code for the Abatement for Dangerous Buildings" published by the International Conference of Building Officials. The second reading is scheduled for January 5, 2009.

Council Passes Resolution Concerning Buyouts of Damaged Properties...

The Council passed a resolution that declared an Urgent Need, to buy out single-family residences, rental properties and small to mid-sized commercial buildings. Susan Wagner, representing the Community Action Team, reported that this Resolution relates to the second \$500,000 CDGB Grant that was received, and is a step towards allowing the city to begin using those funds to assist flood victims.

Council Extends Workers Compensation Coverage to Volunteers...

Council renewed coverage of volunteers under the city's Workers Compensation coverage for year 2008-09.

From Our Elected Officials: The State of the City

By Vernonia Mayor Sally Harrison

The City of Vernonia has been in a state of flux for the past two years, to say the least. This has brought new faces to City Hall, including Interim City Administrator, Jim Johnson; Planner, Carole Connell; Finance, Susan Spicer Pond; Billing and Customer Service Personnel, Helen Hudson, Linda Johnston and Kelli Martinez, all part time; and, of course, our stalwart Office Manager and City Recorder and all round Girl Friday, Joann Glass.

Public Works: A four-man crew consisting of Foreman Jeff Burch, Jim Gido; Scott Rethwill; and Carl Pense keep our water, sewers streets, parks and sundry other projects in good working order.

Police: At this time, we have a three-man force including Interim Chief Mike Kay and Officers Mike Conner and Jeff Dalrymple. We also have had the gratis services of Officer Sean Carnahan for two weeks. Nice guy to volunteer his services.

2009 will bring more changes. The Council has been actively seeking a new City Administrator. Working with Jim Johnson's expertise has set our standards very high and we are not going to settle for less than the right person for the job. We deserve the best. Also, the Police Chief position will be filled at a later date using the same criteria.

I can't say enough about the high quality of City Staff. Their dedication to duty during these trying times has been remarkable.

Flood Relief: Armed with the knowledge that Vernonia needs to be self-sufficient during disasters, we're working on our Disaster Preparedness Plan.

The staff at the County Flood Relief Center have worked tirelessly to secure the funds needed to elevate or buy-out every home that qualifies. No easy task, considering the many bureaucracies and grant propositions to deal with. Patience is the operative word for everyone.

The City is pursuing the possibility of reinstating a flood-control dam on Rock Creek and outlet channels on both Rock Creek and the Nehalem. If these efforts are feasible, they would reduce the amount of flood waters inundating our valley. I'm hoping Vernonians will support these efforts.

Schools: The City's involvement, so far, has been limited to supporting the efforts of the school board and administration. The involvement of Oregon Solutions will accelerate the process of seeing new, safe schools for our community. The City is willing to help in any way it can to facilitate this major project.

When the needs of this community are analyzed, the bottom line has always been how do we finance needed projects and how do we generate a stable funding source so that essential services can be maintained and upgraded. Then, in the same breath, how do we keep from

overburdening the taxed home owners, our only source of funding. The answer is economic development encouraging small businesses to settle here by expanding our urban growth boundaries and providing the atmosphere that's conducive to growth.

We will never have a large company here to provide jobs and contribute large chunks of taxes. So we must utilize the resources we have. Tourism also taps into our asset base. We can and will be a destination for those who love our beautiful outdoors and the friendly atmosphere of a quaint logging town.

Fortunately for this town, we have dedicated staff and volunteers to get the job done. We also have the expertise of people like Bill Haack, the grant guru, and Dale Merrill, Engineer Extraordinaire.

The one thing you can count on is we are not alone. All small towns have trouble with funding infrastructure and staffing. I know that doesn't fix anything, but at least we're all trying.

I truly believe we are in a better place than we were four years ago, and we will be better yet four years from now.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, indeed, it is the only thing that ever has"

-- Anthropologist, Margaret Mead.

PS. I wrote this article before the great snow storm of '08" and lengthy power outages. I feel compelled to tell you how proud I was of our Police Department, especially Incident Commander and Interim Police Chief Mike Kay in conjunction with the Fire Board and their staff. I feel there was no stone unturned, no avenue unexplored, when it came to the needs and safety of our citizens.

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