

Vernonia City News...

At the June 1, 2009, City Council Meeting:

Council Approves Extension of Office Trailers-- City Council approved a request from the Columbia County Unmet Needs Committee to allow the continued siting of temporary office trailers until December of 2009, at the corner of Madison and Washington Streets. Columbia County Unmet Needs is required to periodically come before council for a review for the temporary use, and stated that they expect to need the site until at least December of 2010. In further action, Council passed a motion to try to lease properties acquired through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, allowing private or public use for those properties.

Council Hears Report From St. Helens Police on Use of Force-- Interim City Administrator Jim Johnson read into the record a report by Officer Jon Eggers from the St. Helens Police Department concerning a Use of Force Policy Review of an incident that occurred on March 20 and involving Elliot Graf, Vernonia Police officer Shawn Carnihan and Interim Police Chief Mike Kay. According to Officer Eggers' report, he has been a certified Taser Instructor since 2004 and currently reviews use of force/taser deployments for the St. Helens Police Department. Officer Eggers states in his report that, "It is my opinion that the use of the taser in this instance is justified according to the Vernonia Police Department taser guidelines." He goes on to state, "It is my opinion based on my training and experience that the use of the taser in this instance was reasonable, did not cause excessive injury, and was effective in gaining compliance from Mr. Graf."

Council Views Updated Police Website-- Council was given a preview of the updated Vernonia Police Department website that was prepared by volunteer Colleen Posley. The site provides access to the Police blotter, access to police department forms, information about the K-9 officer program, and more information including information for children and youth. Council also viewed a video of a national television program called "Better," which featured Vernonia K-9 officer Krueger and Chief Kay.

Council Approves Participation in Main Street Program-- Economic Recovery Manager Bill Haack proposed a strategic partnership between the community and city to align economic development projects, with an emphasis on Main Street Development. At the request of Haack, Council authorized Mayor Sally Harrison to sign a letter of intent for the city to participate in the Oregon Community and Economic Development Department's Main Street Program for one year.

Council Considers Restructuring Police Department-- Interim City Administrator Jim Johnson introduced to Council the idea of restructuring the Vernonia Police Department, suggesting Council consider hiring a half-time Police Chief, and creating a position of Police Captain. Johnson provided a staff report explaining the suggested restructuring and possible job duties and responsibilities. Johnson explained that he has discussed his suggestion with a number of other professionals who thought this was an intriguing idea, and that he has also discussed the idea with incoming City Administrator Bob Young and the current members of the Vernonia Police Department, all of whom are supportive of the idea. Council passed a motion authorizing Johnson to prepare to post a half-time position for Chief of Police and to return on June 15th with a financial analysis for a restructured Police Department.

Council Holds Work Session on New Land Development Code Work-- City Planner Carole Connell walked Council through

proposed amendments to several land-use ordinances. Connell explained that the City Planning Commission and city staff have been working to codify numerous ordinances into one document and that the Planning Commission has held several work sessions and two public hearings in order to make changes to Ordinance #711 which details development regulations for the city. A Public Hearing for the changes was scheduled for June 15th.

City Places Deposit to Hold Property-- Council agreed to place a deposit of \$15,000 on a piece of property to hold the property for five months, allowing the city to secure funding for a final purchase.

At the June 15, 2009 City Council Meeting:

Council Approved Police Union Contract-- Council approved a new three-year contract with the Police Union.

Council Holds Hearing and Hears First Reading of Planning Ordinances Changes-- After a Public Hearing to hear testimony concerning changes, council heard a first reading of Ordinance #859 which amends sections of Ordinance #711 and repeals Ordinance #'s 123, 618, 633, 669, 695, 705, 709, 710, 711, 721, 798, 804, 833, and 851 in order to incorporate all land use and development ordinances into a single Title 9 of the Vernonia Municipal Code.

Council Adopts Budget for Fiscal Year 09-10-- After a public hearing, Council adopted the proposed budget for fiscal year 2009-10. The budget includes expenses of \$12.4 million. Council also approved the proposed tax levy rate of \$5.8163 per thousand of assessed value, expected to raise a total tax amount of \$590,207.00.

Council Approves Rate Changes at Cemetery-- Council approved slight increases to all categories of service fees for the Vernonia Memorial Cemetery, that were recommended by the Cemetery Committee.

Council Approves Declaration of Surplus Property-- Council approved a request by the Police Department to declare numerous items that are not being used or are no longer needed because of upgrades as surplus. It included old radios and communications equipment and firearms that the department has seized and were forfeited by the court.

Council Discusses Motor Vehicle Response Fee-- Interim Police Chief Mike Kay introduced the idea of fees that the department would charge to non-city residents when the department is required to respond to motor vehicle accidents. Kay explained this is a concept that has been used in Roseburg to take advantage of a revised Oregon statute that allows a municipality or county to bill a non-resident for a public safety response. This fee would be billed to the insurance company of the party involved and would be an opportunity to recoup funds expended by the responding agency. City staff planned to return to council with a more detailed plan.

Council Hears Police Officer Training Fee Plan-- Interim Police Chief Mike Kay introduced a plan to include an additional Police Officer Training Fee to any fines imposed by the Columbia County Justice Court on citations written by Vernonia Police Officers. Fees collected would be credited to the General Fund for the benefit of police department training and related expenses.

City and County Receive Flood Relief Grants

The Oregon Economic and Community Development Department (OECDD) issued the contracts for the last remaining component in the suite of public support planned and developed by Community Action Team to assist flood victims in Columbia County and the City of Vernonia. The contracts, one for the City and one for the County, each represent a \$500,000 award of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. The CDBG program is a pass-through of federal funds administered by OECDD in the rural portions of the state.

These two long-awaited grant awards will be used to match FEMA funds set aside to purchase flooded homes in Vernonia and Columbia County. Homes will be purchased at their pre-flood value as of December 1, 2007. Without the CDBG funds, homeowners would receive only 75% of their homes value. Once transferred into public ownership, permanent deed restrictions will prevent the properties from being developed in the future.

Federally required preliminary grant requirements, including environmental reviews and public notices, are expected to take 2 to 3 months before individual projects can be completed. In the meantime, Community Action Team will work with

both the City and County to select a contractor or contractors who will demolish the homes once they're purchased. This contractor selection process, which will be run concurrent with the federal requirements, will help the city and county obtain firm demolition costs prior to making their final funding requests to FEMA for each project.

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