

# What's the Plan Stan? A Monthly Update on City Planning

## What You Need to Know About Changes to City Development Regulations

By Seth Lenaerts

In the May article, I wrote about the Planning Commission's duties, responsibilities and work plan for the next few months. It is time for an update. On Monday, June 15, the consultant City Planner Carol Connell was on hand at the City Council meeting for the public hearing and first reading of some of the proposed changes. The second reading will be at the next City Council meeting, Monday, July 6, at 7:00 PM. At that time, the council will vote and it is likely the proposed changes will pass.

These changes are part of a larger effort to update, organize, simplify and clarify the City's planning code and processes. Eventually, all planning ordinances and standards will be compiled into one planning document called Municipal Planning Code: Title 9.

The Monday, July 6<sup>th</sup> Council vote will address the following issues: Home Occupations, Institutional Zone, Conditional Use Permits, Temporary Uses, Floodway Standards and Flood Plain Standards. Here is a brief explanation of proposed changes.

**Home Occupations--** Proposed changes are

meant to encourage small business and clarify home occupation standards. To qualify as a home occupation, applicants must abide by several rules, some of which are: signage, parking, number of daily or hourly customers and hours of business.

**Conditional Use Permits--** Conditional uses are uses that are allowed, granted the applicant, developer, homeowner, etc., meet the conditions set by the Planning Commission. For example, say you apply for a home occupation permit, but your business will exceed the number of daily customers stated in the code. The Commission might decide you can still have the business on the condition that you create extra parking.

Proposed changes are meant to provide applicants clarity and equality as well as criteria for both the applicant and the Commission. Historically, there have not been clear criteria for what an applicant must do to meet the conditional use requirements, nor has the Commission had clear criteria to make the judgment. This can lead to inconsistent decisions.

**Institutional Zone--** The City of Vernonia's Zoning Map is not accurate. One of the major problems is that land is zoned for uses that will never occur there. An Institutional Zone will

be used for such uses as schools, churches, government offices, utility structures and other public and quasi-public uses. Proposed changes are meant to create a realistic inventory of land use.

**Temporary Uses--** Temporary Uses primarily deal with structures that are meant to be temporary, such as trailers, pods, vendor stands, kiosks or temporary offices. These are broken down into three categories; other standards apply, but here is the gist of it:

**Seasonal Temporary Event--** Once in a calendar year, for no longer than 30 days.

**Temporary building, trailer, kiosk or structure, i.e., PODS--** Structure may stay on the property for no longer than six months and may not be on the property in the flood plain during flood season (November 1- May 1).

**Temporary Sales Office or model home--** Must be located where the business is taking place.

**Floodplain Permits--** Proposed changes are meant to come into compliance with FEMA standards, decrease insurance rates and decrease possible obstructions to flood waters. New regulations require that homes in the floodplain

submit plans for new development including walls, fences, stairs and landscaping, in addition to the structure designs. Yes, if you plan on planting things and you live in the Flood plain you must get it approved.

**Floodway Development--** Proposed changes follow FEMA guidelines and regulations. The new code reads, "Vernonia shall restrict land uses within such areas to include the prohibition of construction or reconstruction of residential structures EXCEPT FOR: repairs, reconstruction, or improvements to a structure which does not alter the original footprint or proof of a no-rise certificate." Reconstruction of a house in the floodway is allowable as long as it is on the same footprint or a FEMA no-rise certificate is needed. Finally, Fence Standards were updated. Fences are allowed to be maximum four feet in the front of the property and can not exceed six feet on the sides and back of the property. Speaking of fences and yards, grass is not allowed to exceed 12 inches. Grass that does exceed 12 inches is considered a nuisance which is a citable offense.

If you have any questions, please contact City Hall. Until next time, you don't have to be coy, Roy, just listen to me.

### GEOGRAPHY MATTERS WILL BE BACK NEXT MONTH.

FIND OUT ABOUT VERNONIA'S MONKEY PROBLEM AND THE SPACIAL DISTRIBUTION OF PALM TREES IN THE AREA.

## Commissioners and Sheriff Work to Find Solution to Budget Shortfall

By Scott Laird

Columbia County Sheriff Jeff Dickerson announced major cuts to his patrol officers in late May. Dickerson's announcement has led to public disagreements as the County rounded out their two Public Budget Hearings in mid June. But it looks like at least a partial solution is being worked out to keep some of the positions that were expected to be cut on August 1.

The County Budget had to be completed by June 30, so a number of last minute changes were in the works as Vernonia's Voice went to press.

After the budget meetings were held in Vernonia on June 17 and St. Helens on June 18, it appeared some suggested changes to the budget had been put on the table that would allow the County to retain at least five positions, according to County Commissioner and Budget officer Tony Hyde.

"It looks like we're close to an agreement," said Hyde in an interview after the public hearings.

The issue started in late May when it was leaked that the US Marshals would be significantly reducing the number of prisoners housed in the Columbia County Jails. Columbia County had been keeping about sixty prisoners a day, providing a steady income for the county and the Sheriff's Department. This last minute change caused a panic in the Sheriff's

Department, and the announcement by Dickerson that he would be laying off fourteen employees, including ten patrol deputies who cover the 640 square miles of Columbia County. "Sheriff Dickerson came to me literally twelve hours before my final budget was to be delivered," said Hyde. "And now I had a \$1.2 million hole in revenue in the Sheriff's office," said Hyde.

Dickerson's announcement led to a somewhat public disagreement about how Columbia County should manage its budget. Prior to the second public hearing a more unified message was on display. Dickerson offered some concessions to the Sheriff's budget, and by not making certain requests that were planned, would allow the Commissioners to sequester some funds for next year. Dickerson said he would not build a planned security fence around the jail and would hold off on the purchase a new all-weather patrol vehicle.

There is also a plan on the table that would restore the Oregon State Marine Board fund grant for 80 percent of the cost of two and a half Marine Patrol deputies positions that were scheduled to be cut.

"I was very pleased to see the Sheriff offer some ideas for cuts he could make, and I look forward to working with him to find solutions to these issues," said Hyde. "We will try to match his cuts, in fact we'll try to do more than match them."

"We had a two million dollar hole

going into this years budget process," said Hyde. "Your talking about a twenty plus million dollar general fund, but most of it's pass through. Out of that, only twenty percent is discretionary. We have to provide state mandated services first. It's often not our option to say one thing is a priority over another."

The commissioners in turn may hold off on repaving the county courthouse parking lot, and Hyde suggested he had some other possible ways to help fund deputy positions, including use of some reserve funds. "Fortunately we have reserve funds that we can use as a partial one time stop gap," said Hyde. "We expect next year to be worse than this year. It would be irresponsible to spend down all of that reserve fund in one year. But we will use part of it."

"I'm also not giving up on the possibility of getting those prisoners back from the US Marshal," said Hyde. "They have decided to house them with Multnomah County, at a significantly higher

daily cost. That's our taxpayer money they're spending, and I don't understand why. Something is not right with this and I want to look into it."

"We need to look at long term funding," said Hyde. "We will be formally forming a Task Force that recognizes all stake holders, with a mission statement to look at long term, stable funding for law enforcement in Columbia County."

The Commissioners were working to pass a budget and meet their required deadline of June 30. But the bottom line is it looks like Columbia County will have less of a Sheriff's Department presence on local roads, at least in the near future.

## Columbia County Rider Makes Some Changes

New Vernonia Fixed Route and New Look are Not the Only Changes for Local Public Transit



By Scott Laird

The announcement that Columbia County Rider is adding regular transit service for Vernonia is a welcome addition for this community.

Starting on July 1, Fixed Route Service will be available from Vernonia to the Beaverton Willow Creek Transit Center and to Portland Community College's Rock Creek Campus every morning and evening, Monday through Friday. The Bus will leave around 6:15 AM each morning from Vernonia and return from Rock Creek around 5:30 PM. Schedules were still being adjusted at press time.

In addition, a new Flex Route Service is now available from Vernonia to St. Helens via Scappoose. This bus will run on a continuous two or two and a half hour loop on Tuesdays and Thursdays only. According to Columbia County Transit Coordinator Henry Heimuller, the bus will make regular stops at major locations

like the Medical complex, county courthouse, the unemployment office and major shopping centers. The bus will also have the ability to divert short distances (no more than a half mile) from its regular route in order to assist any passengers with special needs. Exact details were still being planned.

"We did a survey about a year ago in Vernonia, and it appeared there was quite a bit of interest," said Heimuller. "We started looking for funding to start service in Vernonia, but have been turned down from a number of sources. But we decided to go ahead and start this as a pilot project and hope people will support it. And, in a year or so, we can apply for grant money to continue it if we can show there is a need."

But that's not the only change to the transit service for Columbia County. Columbia County Rider is changing the look of its logo and embracing its nickname that most passengers refer to it by: CC Rider. "We've had a lot of good comments about the new logo,"

said Heimuller. "We just wanted to spruce things up a bit and thought it was time for an update, and CC Rider is what a lot of people already call us. I just want people to know there has been no change in our operation, in our ownership or in our service. It's still the Columbia County Transit Division."

One other major change in the works-- CC Rider is in the process of building a new Transit Center in St. Helens. Funding has been secured for the purchase, renovation and construction, and the county was getting ready to close on five acres at Deer island and Highway 30-- the site of the old Stimson Lumber Mill. The new facility will house administrative offices, a fleet maintenance facility, secure bus storage and space for seventy-five vehicles to park and ride.

For more information about changes in Transit Service, contact Henry Heimuller, Transit Coordinator at 503-366-8503 or at H.Heimuller@ColumbiaCountyRider.com or go to [www.columbiacountyrider.com](http://www.columbiacountyrider.com).

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