

VERNONIA'S voice

reflecting the spirit of our community

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Vernonia GIS Ready To Take the Next Step

By Scott Laird

The Vernonia GIS Project has been developing slowly over the last few years, with the help and hard work of Ben Fousek, an employee of KLS Surveying in Vernonia. Now the City has expanded its resources and is ready to take its investment to the next level, and will be asking for community input as this project moves forward into the future.



Sean Pickner, GIS Analyst, is working on the Vernonia GIS Project for the City of Vernonia.

GIS, or Geographic Information Systems (GIS) is a geospatial information system that functions as a set of tools that captures, stores, analyzes, manages, and presents data that are linked to land-based locations. In the simplest terms, GIS is the merging of cartography, statistical analysis, and database technology. GIS systems are used in land surveying, public utility management, natural resource management, urban planning, emergency management, and in many other forms of private industry

and government agency information management.

Over the last few years, the City of Vernonia has used resources provided by Fousek and KLS to initially create a basic, working GIS system. Fousek, who worked with GIS while studying at the University of Oregon, has been a strong proponent for the City of Vernonia to adopt a more advanced GIS program. He has volunteered large amounts of time configuring software and developing maps that city staff are already utilizing, and keeping City Council and community committees up to date on how the program is being used and the benefits of adopting a GIS system.

According to Fousek, the city has been slowly putting together the system sort of piecemeal. "We've gotten to the point where city staff is really seeing the benefits and using the system we have in place," says Fousek.

Now City Hall has decided to advance the project and has made additional investments, including software and hardware and a part-time GIS Analyst. "We're taking the next step to start tackling some of the bigger issues that face Vernonia," says Fousek.

"We want to be able to model, spatially, how this city

works," says Sean Pickner, the GIS Analyst hired by the city to build Vernonia GIS into an operational and functioning program. "With some of these amazing tools that these programmers have created, we can utilize those tools for the city's benefit," says Pickner.

Vernonia Interim City Administrator Pro Tem Bill Haack is excited about the possibilities that having a GIS system in place present. "The excellent work that KLS Surveying has done over the past two years in establishing a GIS framework whet our appetite for using this tool to the benefit of the City," said Haack. "In the past month, having access to a high-skilled GIS professional further establishes the platform that should position the City to proactively manage information in the future in ways that will serve the city for decades as a cost-saving accessible resource for City staff, project developers and the community as a whole."

The practical benefits of having a GIS system in place could be multiple. Pickner envisions Vernonia GIS being used extensively by the City Planning Department. "It gives them the ability to foresee what is going to happen, or identify issues prior to just reacting to a problem," said Pickner during a recent interview at his office at the Vernonia Community Learning Center.

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WOEC Approves Rate Increase

In a unanimous decision, the Board of Directors for West Oregon Electric Cooperative (WOEC) voted to approved a four-percent rate increase starting October 1, 2010, and a five-percent increase taking effect next year. Members will see an increase on their bills immediately.

The Board voted after a Members Meeting on September 28, during which WOEC General Manager Marc Farmer explained the reasons for the requested increase. Farmer also took questions from the members in the audience.

According to Farmer, WOEC management recently completed a ten-year Load Forecast, a ten-year Financial Forecast, and a Cost of Services Analysis (COSA) and determined that a 9% increase spread over two years was needed to maintain levels of services and cover operational costs.

Included in the reasons given for the increase were:

- An increase in wholesale power costs from Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) of 3% this year and at least an increase of 9% next year.
- An increase of \$3 per month added to every customer's facility charge to pay for construction of a new headquarters facility, which equates to a 2% increase in the rates.
- Increases in overall costs of goods, services and materials, especially metal prices.
- Cost of Living adjustments in labor and benefits costs.

The rate increase is expected to generate approximately \$329,000 in additional revenue over the next twelve months

Farmer also noted that WOEC is still trying to recover financially from three weather events that were all declared FEMA disasters. Although

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School Project Steadily Moves Forward Groundbreaking Tentatively Scheduled for December 3rd

The Vernonia Schools Project is slowly working its way through the red tape and and moving towards a historic groundbreaking on what has been known for the last three years as an infamous date.

On December 3, 2007, the Vernonia community was hit with a devastating flood that damaged, among other things, all three local school buildings.

On December 3, 2010, Vernonia District 47J intends to hold an official groundbreaking ceremony for their new K-12 campus high above the flood plain.

Although nothing is set in stone yet, that announcement of good news came during the School Town Hall meeting on September 28th.

Vernonia Superintendent Ken Cox stated that the NEPA/FEMA buyout process is moving forward. There will be a Public Comment Meeting on October 14, 2010, immediately after the regular School Board meeting

that will address the Environmental Assessment that has been prepared for the new school site. Public comments on the Environmental Report will be taken at this time. Written comments must be submitted no later than 5:00 P.M., November 2, 2010. Cox said that FEMA is expediting their timeline to have their review of the report and any public comment done in a few weeks. If no significant issues are identified, the buyout process will move forward-- meaning the District would receive upwards of \$10 million towards their new school construction and the project could break ground in mid- to late November.

At the Town Hall, Cox also introduced Steve Anderson of P&C Construction, who has been chosen as the project Construction Manager/General Contractor. Anderson noted that P&C Construction intends to invite local contractors and subcontractors to a meeting in late October and also intends to meet with residents

along Missouri Avenue to talk about how construction will impact their neighborhood.

The Vernonia Rural Sustainability Center continues to be a viable opportunity. Washington Grade School Principal Aaron Miller continues to head that project for the district. Faculty members from Portland State University and Oregon State University have visited Vernonia for a tour and to look at possibilities within the community to create new educational opportunities. The District continues to look for possible community partnerships and plans include the possibility of extended public use of the facility that would include art and cultural programs.

Cox said he is hopeful that at least part of the new building will be complete in time for spring of 2012, allowing the class of 2012 to graduate from the new facility.