

# Vernonia City News...

## At the March 7, 2011, Vernonia City Council Meeting

**Council Begins Administrator Search Process**— City Council met in a work session with Jenny Messmer of the League of Oregon Cities (LOC) and began the search process for candidates for the City Administrator position. Council agreed to offer a salary of \$60,000 per year plus a benefits package for a full-time employee. Council assisted Messmer in creating a profile for potential candidates and discussed where the position would be advertised. Messmer noted that, given the salary being offered, the pool of potential applicants would probably be limited to "...someone pretty recently out of school or someone who is coming from a really tiny town." Messmer also noted that allowing the current Interim to apply would not be a problem. Council later approved the expenditure of \$6,000 to the LOC for recruitment services with Councilor Randy Parrow voting against it.

**Harrison Presents Petitions**— Former Vernonia Mayor Sally Harrison presented Council with a petition containing 180 signatures from Vernonia residents asking Council to appoint current Interim City Administrator Bill Haack as the permanent Administrator. Harrison asked the three Councilors who voted to begin a search process for other candidates-- Willow Burch, Kevin Hudson, and Marilyn Nicks-- to explain their actions. Burch replied that she thought we had to go through a process and that we needed to know more about the person to whom we are going to hand over control of the city. Hudson said his concern is that the city cannot afford a full-time administrator and that going through a selection process is the most professional way to approach the issue and will be best for the community. Nicks stated it was a very difficult decision to make. She noted that when making a difficult ethical decision, an unbiased and impartial decision-making process is necessary and that the LOC would provide that.

Later in the meeting, six

citizens-- Bill Sword, Sandy Welch, Ken Cox, Scott Laird, Jim Krahn and Ben Fousek-- spoke during Topics From the Floor in favor of hiring Bill Haack.

**Mayor Appoints Emergency Management Committee Members**— With approval from Council, Mayor Josette Mitchell appointed eight members to the newly-formed Emergency Management Committee. The members are Steve Scott, Dean Smith, Cindy Ball, Alexis Posley, Jack Lindley, Heidi Lindsay, Catherine Helmer, and Dan Brown.

**Council Approves Negotiations For Bike Skills Park Grant**— Based on a recommendation from the Parks Committee and staff, Council approved authorizing the City Administrator to negotiate an alternative scope of work or negotiate termination of the existing contract with Oregon Department of Park and Recreation for the grant for the Vernonia Bicycle Skills Park. The grant has a balance of \$202,464 in unused funds; the city has spent \$43,136. The

City administrator will attempt to extend the grant to September, 2013, and negotiate assigning these funds to the new Spencer Park Project. If the contract is terminated, the city would be required to repay the \$43,136 that has already been spent.

**Council Approves Grant Application**— Council approved an application to the Oregon Department Park and Recreation Local Government Program for up to \$500,000 for development of phase I of the new Spencer Park at the site of the existing K-12 schools.

**Council Approves Rules and Procedures**— Council voted to approve an updated version of Council Rules and Procedures.

**Council Approves Signing of Change Order**— Council authorized the Mayor to sign change orders for decreases in contract prices for Vernonia Flood Mitigation Demolition Projects.

## Geography Matters: GIS Can Provide More

By Sean Pickner

Historically, Vernonia has used engineering plans as a reference for information about the city's water utility system. These engineering plans are designed to show how the utilities are installed into the utility network, and often these plans show aspects such as the location, depth, and size of utility features.

This type of design information is most often what is used by utility workers, but it is only a portion of how water utility systems are managed. There are more details about utility systems that can be valuable, but because there are insufficient resources to gather further information, many things are often overlooked, and so we are trying to improve upon the resources available to the Public Works Department.

A basic explanation of how a GIS functions will help to explain how we can implement valuable information into the city's public utility system.

In a GIS, information about features are stored in a table that relates information to a specific geographic feature. For example, the Storm Water Utilities can be modeled through points, and each point has information in a table that shows if that point is a storm drain or some other utility feature.

We can store information that shows the depth of a feature, and can also include all the design aspects that the engineering plans show about that particular feature. We can also include details about the age of the utilities, and the potential value of them, which is information that engineering plans don't necessarily show.

A scenario where this could be valuable to the utility department could be when they need to evaluate what features may be past operational date. When the past operational portions of the system are identified in a GIS table, we can isolate that information and show where those points are located in the city. The Public Works Department can use

this information to access and make more informed decisions on the replacement of the older features, and possibly adjacent features.

With both age and value of utilities, the department could then plan maintenance costs, and instead of rushing to figure how to pay for these replacements, the city can manage these facilities more effectively by taking age and cost into consideration for long-term planning.

Our approach to designing the city's GIS is to provide the city with a tool to help employees better evaluate the information. The GIS model that we are creating for Vernonia's water utilities is going to provide information beyond purely design aspects. We have realized that there is a need for further information about the water utility systems, and so we are going to try and empower the utility department by improving the information that is accessible to them.

## City Will Need to Increase Sewer Rate

Vernonia Interim City Administrator Bill Haack informed Council that in order to repay the work that has already been done on the Wastewater Upgrade Project, rates will need to be increased. Haack noted that in addition to the extension of the \$12 fee currently on the Sewer bill that Council approved at the February 22, 2011 meeting, he will soon bring a resolution to Council to increase rates in July of 2012. Haack stated, informally, that the increase would be for around \$25 or more.

Haack explained that in 2004-2005, the city borrowed \$8 million to build the new wastewater treatment plant and make upgrades. The City has spent \$4.2 million, so far. The interest rate on those expended funds means the city owes \$6.2 million and has not begun to pay any of that back yet. The resolution Haack will bring will set in motion the ability to repay the funds already spent on Phase I of the Wastewater Project. Haack went on to discuss the continuation of the project. "To be in compliance and have a wastewater system that meets the needs of the Department of Environmental Quality, that allows the city not be subject to a moratorium in the future, you will have to finish your wastewater plant. We don't yet know what that will cost," said Haack.

Haack noted that the City will, in all likelihood, qualify for least \$1 million in principal forgiveness from DEQ when the balance of the loan is spent. Haack said that he would also attempt to negotiate with DEQ for some principal forgiveness for money already spent.

### Volunteer Position

Do you want to get involved, volunteer and use your talents? The Vernonia Public Works Committee needs a secretary for taking notes and typing minutes from meetings. Meetings are the fourth Tuesday of each month from 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM. This is a nonvoting position. For more information contact Joann Glass at 503-429-5291.

### Local Properties For Rent



406 A Street  
5 bedroom, 3 bath, family room, laundry room. Updated vinyl windows throughout. Formerly a 3-plex converted into a home. For faster reply contact Ted at 503-799-0999 or leave msg at 503-255-2959 \$975/mo.

For more info contact Danielle 503-784-9560 or leave message at 503-255-2959

**VIP Property Management, Inc.**

### Terry's Gym

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