

Vernonia City News...

At the October 17, 2011 City Council Meeting:

Council Holds Water Rate Study Work Session—City Council held a joint Work Session with members of the Public Works Committee to discuss revised data for a Water Rate Study the Council is considering implementing. Based on information contained in the study, the Council discussed the need to implement a rate that combines a base rate, plus a tiered usage rate. Council asked for additional information and a recommendation from the Public Works Committee, which is scheduled to meet on October 26; Council will discuss the issue further at their November 7 meeting.

Council Extends Deadline for DAD'S Recycling—Council agreed by consensus to give DAD'S Recycling until April

15, 2012 to meet the requirements of their Conditional Use Permit (CUP) and complete the road access to their business. The Conditional Use Permit had previously expired and planning rules forbid the Planning Commission from granting further extensions. At the July 18, 2011 City Council meeting, Council chose to allow DAD'S Recycling to continue to work to complete their project and set certain requirements that had to be met by October 16, 2011. DAD'S has met all the requirements Council had established, but the road is still not in good enough condition and needs additional improvement to meet the terms of the original CUP.

Council Approves Contracts for Biomass Boiler Design—Council approved two contracts with International Wood-Fuels, LLC for the design of two biomass boilers projects. The first project

will help the City of Vernonia determine whether a biomass boiler concept is a feasible component of the Rose Avenue Project. The second contract would assist the Vernonia School District to develop a research and demonstration boiler as a component of the school's natural resources curriculum. These two design contracts are being paid for with a \$25,000 USDA Forest Services grant that the City was awarded in September 2011.

City Administrator Outlines Process for Emergency Declaration—City Administrator Bill Haack provided Council with a document outlining the process the City would use if the need arose to declare an Emergency due to a natural disaster event or threat. According to the process outlined, Council must meet and pass an Emergency Declaration Resolution and then direct the City Administrator to follow the process to notify Columbia County and the State of Oregon Emergency Management Departments.

Council Hears First Reading of Two Ordinances—Council approved the first reading of Ordinance 878, updating powers and duties of the City Budget Committee and repealing the 1924 document which had previously established the Budget Committee. Council also approved the first reading of Ordinance 879 which repealed Ordinance 852 which in February 2008 had been adopted to allow temporary structure to be placed in the General Commercial Zone—specifically allowing FEMA to place units for persons displaced by the flood of December 2007.

Council Approves Acquisition of Two Flood Properties—Council approved the use of CDBG D08030 funds and HMGP funds for the acquisition of properties at 715 Maple Street (the old WOEC building) and 2379 Mist Drive, as part of Acquisition Project 2007 Flood Events.

City Receives Planning Grant—City Administrator Bill Haack notified Council that the City has been successful in an application and been awarded a State Technical Assistance Grant. The grant funds will be used to augment the salary of City Planner Carole Connell and will allow the Planning Department to implement a rezoning project for properties throughout the city. According to Haack the project will start almost immediately.

Water, Sewer and Stormwater Rates Update

The City of Vernonia continues to review changes and improvements in their public works water, sewer and stormwater facility plans.

At this time the City is embarked on a water rate study that will lead to a modification of the water utility rates. This discussion has been of interest to the City Council since 2007 and the City has sought professional input three times to support the work of the City Engineer and the Public Works Committee.

Earlier this year the City engaged Oregon Association of Water Utilities (OAWU) to take the City's ideas and put them into a framework for our review.

The core assumptions of the study are as follows:

- The base rate should cover 60-75% of the annual operating costs for the water fund budget
- Rate structure should be fair and equitable to all classes of users
- Rate structure supporting users outside of the City limits should pay a consumption cost commensurate with users who live within the City limits
- Rate structure should forecast future adjustments in the rate structure on an annual basis
- Rate structure should include reserve accounts to make debt payments and to establish a capital improvement program
- Rate structure should be professionally reassessed on average every five years by a third party

The members of the City Council and the Public Works Committee are reviewing a draft water rates schedule and plan to have a public hearing in the near future on the proposed changes.

As the City has reported in the past, they are actively working on a plan to modify the wastewater facility to further their plan to both be a good steward of the environment and to be in compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Act.


The City is currently out of compliance with the State of Oregon Department of Environmental

Quality (DEQ) National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. Per their NPDES Permit, the City is restricted from releasing third stage water discharge into the Nehalem River for a period of time due to the differential in temperature between the lagoons and the river in the warmer months of the year. For the majority of the year, however, this is not a problem for DEQ and the City discharges to the river during those months of the year.

This past week Jon Forrester, representing the City contract engineer (HLB OTAK, Gearhart OR) made a presentation to City Council that described the City's revised plan for the wastewater facility. Following a meeting with DEQ last month, HLB OTAK has initiated a plan to redirect the discharge from the third lagoon to an underground sand and gravel layer below ground. This is called hyperoxic discharge. After a meeting with DEQ it became clear that this model is a great use natural groundwater to cool the discharge prior to reintegrating with the flow of the river channel. The add information to the study of this model, the City hired Shannon and Wilson, a geotechnical engineering firm, to bore test wells to assess the feasibility of this concept. The City hopes to have their report in December 2011.

Lastly, the City needs to develop a stormwater management plan. It is clear that in developing the final plan for the wastewater facility we will need to develop a related plan to better manage surface water that all too often finds its way into the wastewater lagoons. The City will begin to address this by completing an Inflow and Infiltration (I & I) Assessment in the next six months if we can secure resources for this project. As is clear throughout Vernonia, during major rain events, this additional surge of water can consume the capacity of sewer pipes resulting in home backups and overflows into creeks and surface streets. An I & I assessment will identify where the problems exist throughout the community.

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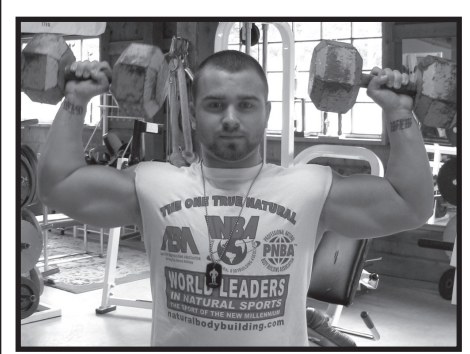
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