

Vernonia City News...

At the February 21, 2012 City Council Meeting:

Mayor Appoints Buxton to Emergency Committee—With approval from City Council, Mayor Josette Mitchell appointed Jim Buxton to the Vernonia Emergency Preparedness Committee.

Council Approves Release of Escrow Funds for School—At the request of School Superintendent Ken Cox, the Vernonia City Council approved the release of escrow funds of approximately \$500,000 to be paid out to the Vernonia School District. The funds were designated for the replacement of Spencer Park to be developed at the existing school site. (See story on front page.)

Council Approves Contract for Hydrology Study—Council authorized City Administrator Haack to sign a contract with HDR Engineering to conduct a hydrology assessment of Rock Creek above the City's wastewater lagoons. According to Haack the City is attempting to prove through this engineering model that the removal of numerous structures in the flood zone and a proposed change to a section of the Linear Trail between the Vernonia Lake and the wastewater lagoons would allow the City to avoid a costly reconfiguration of the wastewater lagoons as part of their Wastewater Facility Upgrade Project.

City Rezoning Project to Begin—City Administrator Haack reported to Council on behalf of City Planner Carole Connell, that the City has received grant funds of

\$6,000 from the State Department of Land Conservation and Development and can now begin a planned re-zoning of properties within the City.

Council Approves Second Reading of Committee Ordinance—Council approved the second reading of Ordinance 880 which establishes the organization of all City Committees and prescribes the general powers and duties of those committees. This restructuring of City Committees has been a goal of Mayor Josette Mitchell since she took office in January of 2011.

Council Approves Designation of Parks Parking Area—Council approved Resolution 05-12 which would designate a portion of the former West Oregon Electric Cooperative

property as a parking area for City Parks. The City will acquire this property in the near future through the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program and the property is subject to flood plain restrictions, which limit its uses. The City will request that the paved parking area at the corner of Maple Street and Adams Avenue be allowed to remain paved and provide parking for City Parks.

Council Approves Personnel Handbook—Council approved a revised version of the City Personnel Handbook for employees, a revised Communication and Communications System Policy and a revised Guidelines and Media Relations Policy. All of revisions had been prepared and reviewed by the City Legal Council.

Vernonian Becoming CASA Volunteer

By Scott Laird

Leslie Seibert believes she can make a difference in a child's life.

Seibert, who lives just outside Vernonia, is getting ready to begin training to become a CASA volunteer in Columbia County through CASA for Kids, Inc.

CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocate. CASA volunteers help make sure that abused and neglected children who are in foster care don't fall through the cracks of our overburdened legal and social-service system.

"These kids have social workers and they have attorneys—they have professionals in their lives. But those professionals have many other children that they are also responsible for," explains Seibert. "And these kids just really need an advocate that is focused on them. That is really taking the time to get to know them and to listen to their story."

CASA for Kids, Inc. screens, trains, and supervises volunteers who advocate for the best interests of children in juvenile-dependency court system. They have an office in St. Helens that assists children in Columbia County.

Executive Director Kathryn Bourn says that last year 253 children in Columbia County were placed in foster care. And that number is rising—quickly. In 2009 it was 182.

"There are kids of all ages in our county that are in foster care for one reason or another and for them to have an individual advocate that they can really talk to, really get to know and trust—that seems like a good idea to me," says new volunteer Seibert about the reasons she chose to become a CASA volunteer. "And that's what they [CASA For Kids] are doing. They're taking people

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