

Vernonia City News...

At the February 18, 2014 City Council Meeting:

Topics from the Floor-Five members of the Vernonia Health Board, Rachel Langmaid, Wendy Sears, Olin Younger, Brett Costley and Erika Paleck, spoke about concerns that the Council and the Health Board have not reached an agreement on a lease for the property at the Rose Avenue Project where the Health Board intends to build a new Health Center. Concerns mostly centered on Council's intention to charge rent for the property, even though the Health Board has been told they would only be charged \$1. Health Board members expressed that the Council had not negotiated in good faith and had waited until the last minute to bring up the issue of rent.

Council Discusses Rent for Health Center-Although this item was not on their agenda, Council discussed, during the City Administrator Report portion of the meeting, the Health Center lease and rent that they should charge all tenants of the Rose Avenue Project. All Councilors expressed their commitment to the project and the importance of having health care available in our

community, but also reiterated that they have an obligation to negotiate on behalf of all citizens of the community. Council noted that because they are now partners with Oregon State Parks for the trail from Anderson Park to the Lake, they have additional maintenance responsibilities for the trail. Through a calculation that took into account trail maintenance and legal fees the City has incurred to obtain the Rose Avenue property, Council reached consensus that they would charge \$15 per month for each of the four potential entities at the Rose Avenue Project. According to Mayor/City Administrator Josette Mitchell, this is the final issue in the negotiations for the lease and that all other issues have been resolved.

Council Approves Purchase of New Billing System-Based on recommendations from the Public Works Committee and numerous staff members, the Council approved moving forward with a new Utility Billing system through Muni Billing. The new system is user friendly, less expensive than the current system, does not require a contract, allows for different paying methods for customers, provides the ability to produce useful reports and has

a low initial installation cost.

Council Approves GIS Contract-Council approved a contract with Ben Fousek to provide GIS services to the City including mapping, documents and other related materials. The scope of work also calls for working with the City Administrator to create a Flood Plain Management System. The contract expires June 30, 2014 and is not to exceed \$10,000.

Council Updates Master Fee Schedule-Council adopted Resolution 5-14, Amending the Master Fee Schedule including changes to Parks Fees, Cemetery Fees and Administrative and Planning Fees. The changes to the Parks Fees included the implementation of hourly, daily and weekend fees for use of the Vernonia Horse Arena at Anderson Park. Changes to the Cemetery Fees included changes to the fees for Adult Internment, Arrival at the cemetery after 3:30 PM, Saturday Internment, and Sunday or Holiday Internment. Changes to the Administrative and Planning Fees included the implementation of Consulting Fees for GIS Services hourly fees.

Council Adopts Supplemental Budget-Council approved Resolution 6-14, adopting a supplemental budget for the General Fund. The supplemental budget decreases Available Cash on hand by \$22,045 and Income from Property taxes by \$30,000 and also decreases Payroll expenses by \$6,751, Police Department Expenses by \$42,334 and makes other adjustments to several line items.

Daylight Saving Time Starts
Sunday, March 9
Set your clocks ahead one hour.

Vernonia City Council Meetings and Closures

City Council Meetings are scheduled for 7 PM:
Monday, March 3, 2014
Monday, March 17, 2014

There are no City Closures scheduled at this time.

Dates and times subject to change due to conflicts of schedules

An Opinion: Oregonian Article *continued from page 3*

(approximately 540) one student who is not attending but on the attendance roll, can skew the data; several can skew it significantly.

The fact that two years ago The Oregonian pointed out Vernonia's poor absenteeism record does make a reader wonder why the Administration and School Board didn't do something then about the issue. But, as the Oregonian article fails to acknowledge, two years ago the Vernonia School District was deep in the process of finishing construction of the new schools campus and preparing to move from their old campus to the new one. And they were also dealing with some big fundraising, as well as yearly operation budget shortfalls. In other words, they had some fairly big issues already on their agenda.

One could also easily believe that, as the Oregonian article does acknowledge, attending classes in modular classrooms did have an impact on absenteeism rates. The flip side is that school administrators probably believed that opening a brand new campus would automatically help increase attendance.

The VSD has tried to address the needs of students and boost engagement through creative programming. The new Sustainability curriculum is innovative and progressive and the Forestry program offers training in a regionally significant employment field. A recent grant the District received for \$250,000 will help address the lack of a shop facility and expand technical training. These are all factors that help keep students interested in attending class.

A lifestyle factor the Oregonian article mentioned as impacting attendance, hunting, should be taken with a grain of salt. Oregon is an extremely rural state and hunting is part of the culture everywhere except Portland. Kids take time off from school to hunt with their families all over this state. This should not be used as a reason that Vernonia is behind other school districts.

In reading the comments concerning the Oregonian article at their website, I was impressed with the thoughtful commentary that readers brought forward. One concern was bullying; kids won't go to school if they don't feel comfortable and

safe. This is also an issue the VSD has attempted to address in a serious manner. Students at Vernonia Schools have received numerous professional trainings and awareness programs over the last several years, thanks in part to the great work of, and funding from, the Vernonia Prevention Coalition. Certainly we can't say that bullying has been eliminated from our schools, but the issue is definitely on the radar and being addressed.

Another point raised in the comments is the role of parental responsibility. In the opinion of some readers, our society has embraced the passing off of raising our children, and some parents no longer take responsibility for student achievement.

This may be the biggest factor in school attendance. As was noted at the recent Vernonia School Board meeting, school staff can only work with and teach students if they show up. Parents need to see the value in, and encourage their children to be in class everyday, and make sure they arrive at school ready to learn. It needs to be a priority for both the parents and the students. How the

School District can impact a parent's values is somewhat limited.

Following the flood in 2007 and then the economic downturn, Vernonia saw a large increase in students who were, in fact, "homeless," with parents who had moved away to find work. Numerous students lived with friends and "couch surfed" without a strong parental influence in their life. This factor also had an influence on attendance figures.

The Oregonian gives the impression throughout most of the article that the VSD is unaware they have a problem and concludes that they aren't really all that interested in addressing it. They only briefly touch on the progress and improvements that has been made this year, and ignore several important factors unique to Vernonia.

While the Vernonia School District needs to continue to improve their efforts in confronting absenteeism, they were attempting to address the issue, even before The Oregonian so harshly, and somewhat unfairly, pointed it out. Let's hope it remains a priority and we continue to see additional improvements.

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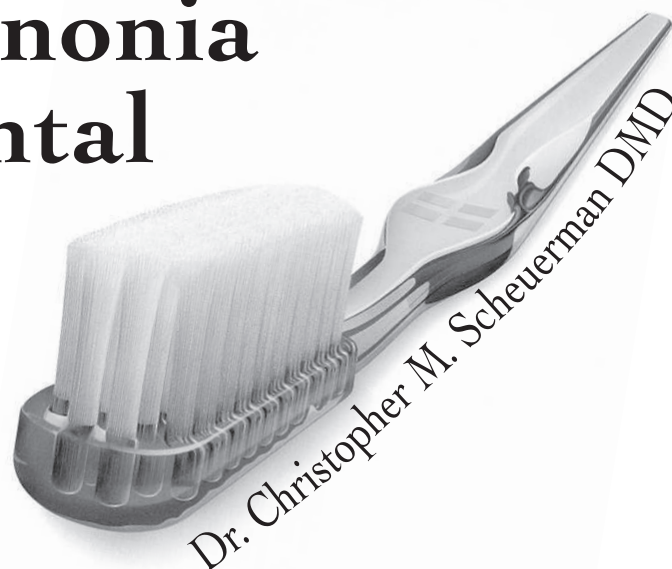
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