

Vernonia Fire District Places Two Measures on May Ballot

The Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District has filed two ballot measures with the Columbia County Elections Office to be placed on the May 19, 2015 election ballot.

One measure is a five year levy for Emergency Services Training and Operations. This measure would provide funding for the District to hire a Training Captain who would be responsible for operation of the District training program. The Training Captain would also respond to incidents during their work shift, thereby increasing daytime response personnel within the District. This levy would cost taxpayers an estimated \$0.32 per thousand of assessed value each year. The estimated annual average cost would be \$32 per \$100,000 of taxable assessed value.

The second measure is a General Obligation Bond and would raise funds to purchase and upgrade fire apparatus and equipment. The bonds would mature no later than ten years from date of issuance and is estimated to cost taxpayers an average of \$0.2621 per thousand of assessed value each year. The estimated annual average cost for property owners would be \$26.21 per \$100,000 of



Volunteers from the Vernonia Fire District responded to a structure fire on March 25. Firefighters from Mist-Birkenfeld and Banks assisted with the call.

assessed value.

Fire Chief Dean Smith is the District's administrator and only paid responder; all other emergency responders are volunteers. Smith says his administra-

tive duties are continually expanding and says the District is reaching a breaking point. He says the mandatory training requirements and time commitment for volunteers, the continually increasing volume of calls the District receives, and the outside priorities like family, work and school are creating a perfect storm that makes volunteer recruitment and retention extremely difficult. With only eleven current volunteers, a number Smith says is as low as he's ever seen it, Smith says the ability of the District to continue to provide the current level of service is impossible.

"We're at a point where the District has to have another body here that can take some of these tasks and manage them with oversight from myself," explains Smith. "It's become imperative. We can't continue to give the same level of service if we don't."

As an example, Smith noted that during the recent structure fire in town, Vernonia was only able to respond with one engine and only had one officer, two firefighters and one cadet available to respond.

"If we can get someone dedicated to the Training Captain position we can create a more stable and

sustainable training program, and I believe we can only grow," says Smith.

Smith addressed the bond measure for the apparatus purchase, saying the District's equipment is mostly out of date and does not meet current safety standards or recommendations. The bond would allow the District to purchase a brand new water tender/pumper to replace the thirty-five year old, outdated one they currently are using. Smith says the District last went out for a bond in 2000 which sunset in 2010 and used those funds to purchase their current first-out engine. The recent purchase of a twenty

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Merkley and Bonamici to Hold Joint Town Hall in Vernonia

Oregon Senator Jeff Merkley and Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici will hold a joint town hall in Vernonia on Friday, April 3 at 2:00 PM at the Vernonia School Commons.

They will update constituents on their work in Washington, D.C. and answer questions and invite suggestions about how to tackle the challenges facing Oregon and America.

"There are huge issues facing Oregonians and the best way for me to effectively advocate for Oregon's families and businesses is by getting out on the road and holding a town hall in every county, every year to hear directly from Oregonians," said

Merkley. "I invite all residents of Columbia County to come and discuss what we need to do to strengthen our state and nation."

"Listening to constituents is an important part of my work," Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici said. "Town hall meetings provide the opportunity for me to hear about the issues facing this diverse district and learn how I can help. Constituents always provide valuable feedback that informs the work I do when I'm back in Washington, D.C."

Since joining the Senate in 2009, Merkley has held a town hall in each of Oregon's 36 counties every year. The town hall in Vernonia will be his 224th town hall as a U.S. Senator.

Coffee with the Commissioners Scheduled

The Columbia County Board of Commissioners will be meeting in Vernonia to visit with local citizens for a "Coffee with the Commissioners" event on Friday, April 17 at 9:00 AM at the Black Iron Grill, 831 Bridge Street.

According to the Board of Commissioners office, the Board will be traveling around the county throughout the next year, meeting in each of the five cities for these types of events where they can chat with locals about their issues, concerns and ideas.

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More Changes for Senior Center

The Vernonia Senior Center has adjusted their plans once again.

When their old location at 446 Bridge Street was scheduled to be demolished, the Seniors moved their thrift store to the Learning Center at 939 Bridge Street. The newly named "Bridge Street Bargains" is now up and running and is loaded with merchandise for the thrifty shopper.

The Senior office is also on site at the new Bridge Street location. Community Action Team's Karen Miller is available in the office on Mondays to assist seniors with their issues and concerns.

The big change for the Seniors is the relocation of the lunchtime meal program to the American Legion Hall which shares space with the Vernonia Cares Food Bank at 627 Adams Avenue. Catered meals,



which are delivered and warmed on site, will be served on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, beginning early in April.

"Since the Food Bank is open Tuesday and Thursday, this seems like a good fit and will make heating the meals easier for the cook,

Wendy West," said Sandy Welch, Executive Director of Vernonia Cares as well as the Secretary for the Senior Center Board of Directors

According to Welch Friday afternoon games will also be relocated to the Legion Hall.