

Vernonia City News...

At the January 19, 2016 City Council Meeting:

Council Tables Amendment to Conservation Easement – Council held a lengthy discussion concerning a request to amend the Conservation Easement they placed on the Lincoln School property. Council ended up tabling any decision and asked for more information from the City’s legal counsel. (See full story on this page.)

Council Approves Contract for CDBG – Council approved the contract between the City and Infrastructure Finance Authority (IFA) for the Oregon

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Project Number C15008. The grant is for \$2,000,000 for the design and construction of the Rose Avenue Senior Center and Food Bank. The new facility is expected to be approximately 8,600 square feet and will be owned and developed by the City of Vernonia. The contract provides 36 months for completion of the project.

Council Designates Parrow Certifying Officer – Council designated Mayor Randy Parrow as the Certifying Officer for CDBG Project Number C15008. Any entity receiving CDBG funding must have a Certifying Officer to be in

compliance. The Certifying Officer is generally the chief elected official.

Council Adopts Excessive Force Policy – As a requirement of receiving CDBG funds, the City adopted an Excessive Force Policy. The policy outlines the City’s responsibility in regards to civil rights protests and demonstrations.

Council Receives Quarterly Financial Report – Council received a Quarterly Financial report from Finance Director Angie Handegard.

Mayor Appoints Ayres to Library Board – With a recommendation from

the Library Board and consensus from the City Council, Mayor Randy Parrow appointed Haley Ayres to the Library Board.

Topics From the Floor - David Mile addressed the Council and asked for consideration of his request to amend the Conservation Easement that limits use at the Lincoln School property.

Council Tables Change to Lincoln Easement

The Vernonia City Council held a lengthy discussion at their January 19, 2016 meeting concerning a request to amend the Conservation Easement for the Lincoln School property. The request was made by Vernonia Brands, LLC who have said they intend to develop a marijuana growery operation at the site. Council made no decision and tabled the discussion until they could get more information.

The Conservation Easement was put in place by the Vernonia City Council on May 4, 2015 to allow commercial development on the 1.14 acre site located at 1462 Bridge Street and preserve the conservation values associated with the building. The Conservation Easement was included as part of a comprehensive plan/zoning map amendment approved by the City Council that changed zoning of the property from Residential (R) to General Commercial (GC).

The amendment came at the request of attorney Ross Day, representing Warren “Bud” Dow, the current owner of the property, and Vincent Sliwoski, representing Vernonia Brands, LLC and principal David Mile who have a lease for use of the property.

Mile previously introduced himself to the Council at their January 4, 2016 meeting, explaining that he hopes to develop an agriculturally based craft enterprise similar to a winery, brewery, or distillery that would make Vernonia a destination by bringing new commercial appeal to the community. Mile has projected that his enterprise would create 20 new jobs and \$80,000 in new tax revenue for the City. Mile has launched a website www.vernoniabrand.com to recruit investors and explain the concept

of his business venture.

Mile’s plans hit a snag when it was revealed to the Council at the January 4 meeting by City Attorney Ruben Cleaveland that the Conservation Easement contains language in sections 4(f) and 5(c) which defines “prohibited uses” to include: *Any activity not in compliance with any federal, state, and local law, regulation, or requirement applicable to the building.* Cleaveland pointed out that this would restrict any business involving marijuana, since sale, possession or cultivation of marijuana is still against federal law.

The Council received letters from both Day and Sliwoski indicating that the restricting verbiage was “boilerplate language” which was inserted to protect the property from damage and environmental violations, and not intended to restrict the use of the property. Both Day and Sliwoski were in attendance at the January 21 Council meeting and asked Council to amend the Conservation Easement to allow the proposed use by Vernonia Brands, LLC. Section 16 of the agreement allows for it to be modified with the agreement of both parties.

Property owner Dow had indicated during the previous public hearing concerning the property that without a zone change his only option would be to tear down the school building and construct new homes. The Conservation Easement guarantees that any owner of the building may not tear it down.

Sliwoski stated in his letter that Vernonia Brands, LLC is committed to preserving the building and putting “... this unproductive property to use.” He

also stated that Vernonia Brands, LLC is committed to being a good community partner in accordance with state and local law, including any time, place, and manner restrictions the City of Vernonia may adopt with respect to marijuana.

Sliwoski also stated in his letter that Dow, Vernonia City Administrator Josette Mitchell, Day and Cleaveland all agree that the restrictive language was “boilerplate” and was not intended to prohibit the use of the property. Cleaveland, who helped draft the easement along with Day, disagreed with Sliwoski in a memo he sent to the Council, stating: “The language used and reasoning for the Conservation Easement was in response to concerns directly related to the use of the property. There was significant consideration into how a given commercial activity would affect the neighborhood. It was not merely to protect against damage and environmental acts.”

Council asked Mile several times to clarify his intentions for the property and appeared unsatisfied with his responses. Several members seemed unwilling to commit to approving any changes to the agreement without a clear description of what can and can’t take place on the site. Councilor Kim Tierney expressed concern that the regulations governing the marijuana industry are currently in flux and noted that she was concerned about how this business at that location might impact the neighborhood.

Council tabled any decision until they could further discuss time, place and manner restrictions. They also asked for more information from their attorney on how any decision they make might be interpreted by federal law.

Bonamici Convenes Education Leaders

Congresswoman Contributed to Passage of New Law

Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) convened a briefing and discussion of the Every Student Succeeds Act, the law that replaced No Child Left Behind and advanced new K-12 education policies. More than fifty leaders in education attended.

Congresswoman Bonamici, a member of the House Education Committee, served on the select panel of House and Senate members who crafted the final version of the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Congresswoman Bonamici successfully included provisions to help states and school districts eliminate redundant or unnecessary tests and to support interdisciplinary educational programs that integrate arts into STEM courses.

“Strengthening public education is one of the top reasons I got involved in public service,” said Congresswoman Bonamici. “Oregon’s students deserve better than No Child Left Behind, so I went to work with my colleagues from both sides of the aisle. Under the new Every Student Succeeds Act, our federal K-12 education policies will reduce high-stakes testing, which narrowed curriculum and stifled teaching and learning, and facilitate more decision-making at the local and state level. I was honored to stand with President Obama as he signed the Every Student Succeeds Act, but my job doesn’t end there. Convening Oregon’s education leaders is my first step in making sure this law is implemented successfully and best serves our students, families,

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**Police Blotter
January 1 - 19, 2016**

REPORTS TAKEN

- January 1, 2016 Report of a Release Agreement in the 1000 Block of 1st Ave.
- January 5, 2016 Arrest on a Warrant near Missouri Ave.
- January 16, 2016 Report of Disorderly Conduct on Bridge St.

CITATIONS

- January 1, 2016 Cited for Violating the Speed limit near E Bridge St.

Vernonia City Council Meetings and Closures

City Council Meetings are scheduled for 7:00 pm:
Monday, February 1, 2016
Tuesday, February 16, 2016

City Closures are scheduled for:
Monday, February 15, 2016
Presidents’ Day

Dates and times subject to change due to conflicts of schedules

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