

Vernonia City News...

At the November 21, 2016 City Council Meeting:

Council Approves Johns for Library Board – Mayor Randy Parrow, with a recommendation from the Library Board and approval from the City Council, appointed Ginger Johns to the Library Board.

Council Approves Bond for Wastewater Treatment Project – Council passed Resolution 07-16, providing for the issuance and sale of a revenue bond, not to exceed \$5,577,000, to provide a portion of the costs to finance capital construction and improvements to the City's wastewater system. (See full story on front page.)

Topics From the Floor – Natalie Williams expressed concern about an incident that occurred on her property on Nokes Road in September where she now lives alone. Williams said she had issues with family members at the property who were making threats of physical violence and called 9-1-1 to request police assistance and had to wait 40 minutes for the Sheriff's office to arrive; the property is not within the City limits. She said she had previously contacted Vernonia Police Chief Mike Conner to tell him she was anticipating trouble, and asked what the role of the local police department is in this type of situation and asked why they did not respond when she needed help. Chief Conner responded that his department will respond to calls outside the City limits if requested to do so by the Sheriff's Office, but said that each circumstance is a little bit different. Both he and City Administrator Josette Mitchell said they would further investigate the specific incident.

Council Agrees to Hold Just One Meeting in December – The Council agreed to only hold one meeting during the month of December. Council chose to cancel their regularly scheduled meeting on December 19, but will meet on December 5.

Council Prepares to Move Forward With Downtown Tree Removal

The Vernonia City Council is preparing to move forward with a plan to remove all the trees from the downtown corridor.

The Council met in a workshop on Monday, November 28, 2016 and discussed the issue which they have been wrestling with for several years. Although no final decision was able to be made at the workshop, by the end of the evening it appeared the Council is prepared to take action at their December 5 meeting and move forward with removing all the trees in the downtown.

No date has been set for the removal of the trees although it appears the Council will ask staff to wait until the new year before beginning the process. Council does not appear to have settled on a clear plan for what to do after the trees have been removed.

The issue of the downtown trees was first brought to the Council's attention when several business owners began complaining about damage being caused to sidewalks by the root systems and also the size of the trees blocking their signage. The current trees that were planted as part of a downtown beautification project about 20 years ago have been deemed the wrong species for the small sidewalk space the City has, and tend to grow too large if not regularly maintained.

Other concerns that have been raised by business owners include the removal of falling leaf and limb debris, and trees interfering with parking.

The expense incurred by the City to maintain the trees has also been raised as an issue by several members of the Council.

Another concern raised by City staff is that when new sidewalks were installed around the same time the trees were planted, gas and water lines were also installed underneath those sidewalks. There is concern the tree roots will cause damage to those underground lines.

Originally there were 43 trees in the downtown corridor. Four trees were removed initially and then the City removed 16 more during this past year.

Council and staff have discussed and explored several options if the trees are removed, including replacing them with a more suitable tree, replacing the trees with planters that could contain the root systems of either trees, shrubs or plants, or not replacing the trees with anything.

A survey of downtown business owners conducted by the City found a split when asked about the trees and what business owners would like to see happen if the trees were removed. 33% of business owners said the trees caused "none to little trouble," 25% said they were "somewhat of an issue," and 41% said they were "often to extreme trouble." 8% of business owners said they would like the trees to remain as they are, while 46% said they would like to have the trees replaced with an appropriate species. 25% said they

would like to see the trees removed and replaced with a planter, and 21% said they would like the trees removed and not replaced.

An August 2015 memo from then City Administrator GianPaolo Mammone indicated that staff research had identified three species of trees that met the criteria of trees that could be planted in the downtown corridor: Canadian Red Chokeberry, Japanese Tree Lilac, and Zelkova City Sprite.

On June 13, 2016 Council met in a workshop to discuss options for the trees. At that meeting Councilors Bruce McNair and Mike Seager, along with Mayor Randy Parrow, advocated for removing all the trees and not replanting, while Councilors Kim Tierney and Jill Hult wanted to see the trees replaced, though less densely. All members of Council agreed to immediately remove several trees that were causing visible damage to sidewalks and that the rest of the trees should be removed within two years. They agreed to wait to make any final decision on what to do after the trees are removed.

At the most recent meeting on November 28, Councilors Tierney and Hult again advocated for replacing the trees, while Councilors McNair and Seager said they thought the downtown streetscape would be better without trees and would like to see it more focused on the architecture of the downtown buildings. Council discussed establishing some type of ordinance

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Wastewater Treatment Upgrade *continued from front page*

project," said Mitchell.

Mitchell said the Council and Public Works Committee were planning to set an annual date when they would review rates and the size of the customer base and use a rate calculator to determine the cost to operate and maintain the utility and make any adjustments as needed. "If we are able to lower the rates, that is when it would take place, prior to us entering the budget cycle," said Mitchell.

Mitchell noted that both

the Water and Sewer accounts have maintenance reserve accounts that receive funding each year from the budget, so that future improvements and upgrades can have funding available when needed.

"The members of the Public Works Committee, who represent the general public on projects like this, have been very instrumental in pushing the issues forward," said Mitchell. "Sometimes staff and the Committee don't always agree and there have been some contentious things we've had to work through together, but in the end it provides a better product for the citizens. They worked really hard and are to be commended."

Mitchell said the lower interest rate on the bond will allow the rate to stay stable

for longer and said that if the City continues to add more customers, there is the possibility that customers could see a rate decrease in the next budget. "We'll know more when we look at all the numbers in the spring," said Mitchell. "If we gain more customers, then the pie is cut into smaller pieces. We also have to consider inflation and what things cost."

"As a citizen, I like that we're analyzing these costs and charging what we need to operate the utility," said Mitchell. "Sometimes people forget that we're all paying these bills too, so we don't want to make decisions that increase our bills either. We do have everyone's best interest at heart."

Vernonia Police Blotter • November 15-28, 2016

ARRESTS / REPORTS TAKEN

- November 15, 2016 Arrest for Driving While Suspended/Revoked near Nehalem HWY South
- November 18, 2016 Report of an Abandoned Vehicle near North St. and Washington Avenue
- November 21, 2016 Arrest on a Warrant near Keasey Road
- November 22, 2016 Arrest on a Warrant near Nehalem HWY South
- November 22, 2016 Report of a Motor Vehicle crash near East Bridge Street
- November 24, 2016 Report of Disorderly Conduct II and Unlawful

- Use of a Weapon near East Bridge Street
- CITATIONS / OTHER**
- November 16, 2016 Cited for Failure to Maintain Lane and Failure to Carry Proof of Insurance near Rose Avenue
- November 16, 2016 Cited for Violation of the Posted Speed Limit
- November 17, 2016 Cited for Driving While Suspended and Uninsured near State Avenue
- November 17, 2016 Cited for Violation of the Posted Speed Limit near Bridge Street
- November 18, 2016 Cited for Violation of the Posted Speed Limit near Nehalem HWY South Mile Post 65

- November 22, 2016 Cited for Violation of the Posted Speed Limit near Nehalem HWY South Mile Post 63
 - November 25, 2016 Cited for No Operators License near Rose Avenue
 - November 25, 2016 Cited for Failure to Obey a Traffic Control Device near Grant Avenue
 - November 26, 2016 Cited for Expired Registration near Texas Avenue
- Vernonia Police Department responds to calls that do not always end in Arrest, Report, or Citation. 11/15/2016 through 11/28/2016 VPD had 172 calls for service.**

The Vernonia Transfer Station is open on the 1st and 3rd Saturdays in December

December 3 & 17

Dates are subject to change

Vernonia City Council Meetings and Closures

City Council Meetings are scheduled for 7:00 pm:
Monday, December 5, 2016
(No meeting December 19)

City Closures are scheduled for:
Noon on Friday, December 23, 2016
Monday, December 26, 2016
Christmas Holiday

Dates and times subject to change