

# Vernonia City News...

## At the January 17, 2017 City Council Meeting:

**Council Agrees on New Planner** – Council agreed with a recommendation from City staff and will extend an agreement offer to Carole Connell to provide planning services for the City. The agreement would state a per hour rate not to exceed \$20,000 annually. Connell had previously served as the City Planner for several years and brings extensive experience and is familiar with Vernonia’s planning codes. According to staff and Councilor Susan Wagner, who previously served on the Planning Commission, Connell will be welcomed back enthusiastically.

**Council Discusses Need to Clear Vegetation Around 9-1-1 Tower** – Council discussed a request from Columbia 9-1-1 to clear vegetation and trees from around the 9-1-1 transmission tower located on City property above the cemetery. Vegetation and trees outside the fenced area that surrounds the tower are encroaching and interfering with the signal. City Administrator Josette Mitchell explained that there is a need for a taller tower since the City is managing trees in the area to be

harvested for profit at some future date, but there are no current resources to upgrade the current tower. Mitchell said that the City Public Works crew will take care of the work and fall two trees that are creating interference. Councilor Bruce McNair suggested those trees could be included in an additional logging project this spring.

**City Approves Resolution for Extended Enterprise Zone Benefits for Cascade Tissue** – Council passed Resolution 01-17 authorizing the extension of Enterprise Zone Benefits for a fourth and fifth year to Cascades Tissue Group - Oregon. The resolution was requested by the Columbia County Economic Team (CCET) as part of the City of Vernonia’s membership in the South Columbia County Enterprise Zone. As part of the extension of the benefits Cascades Tissue has agreed to invest \$53.6 million in the facilities in Scappoose and St. Helens and agrees to create 71 new jobs paying average wage and benefit packages of no less than \$55,346 per year for five years. Taxes for Cascade Tissue that are being abated for five years as part of the agreement are estimated at \$877,512

annually, but betterment funds will be paid annually by Cascade Tissue to CCET in the amount of \$87,751 which will be shared with the local jurisdictions of Scappoose and St. Helens.

**Council Members Adjust Committee Liaisons** – Council discussed revising some Committee Liaisons. Councilor Bruce McNair suggested that the liaison position to the Senior Center was redundant and that City staff, who are already regularly attending Senior Center Board meetings, could keep the Council informed of issues that involved the seniors. The rest of the Council agreed with McNair. Mayor Mario Leonetti and Councilor Susan Wagner agreed to change Committee Liaisons; Leonetti will now be liaison to the Cemetery Committee and Wagner will now be the liaison to the Library Board.

**Council Schedules Work Session** – Council discussed the need to hold upcoming work sessions and scheduled to meet to discuss City Goals/Priorities on Monday, February 13 at 6:30 pm. Other topics that were suggested for potential workshops included streets and *continued on page 6*

## City Addresses Emergency Shelter Concerns

During the recent power outage that affected all West Oregon Electric Cooperative (WOEC) customers on January 9-10, questions were raised on social media about why an emergency shelter was not opened in the community.

When questioned, City of Vernonia officials stated that there was not a need for an emergency shelter.

“There has to be a need and people that are going to come and use it,” said Vernonia Police Chief Michael Conner. “We didn’t get any official requests or people telling us they were cold, they needed supplies, or they needed shelter. That’s what we base the decision to open up a shelter on, and make those resources available, if there is a real need.”

Conner said there are several options for shelters if needed within the community, including the school building and several area churches have volunteered to open as shelters if the need arises, but noted that if school is scheduled to be in session, that needs to be considered.

That is exactly the scenario which occurred during this most recent power outage, when power was lost due to downed transmission lines that feed WOEC from Bonneville Power Administration. Power went out around 4:00 pm on Monday, January 9 and was restored starting around 6:00 am on Tuesday, January 10, and was brought back on-line in stages over the next several hours. The Vernonia Schools were opened to students that day on a two-hour delay.

Vernonia City Administrator

Josette Mitchell agreed with Conner’s assessment. “There is a number of factors that go into the decision to open a local shelter,” explained Mitchell. “Usually the decision is made by either our police or fire personnel and it is necessitated by the number of calls received. We also consider if it looks like the situation is going to be for over 24 hours. In this instance, the police or the dispatch had received zero calls about anyone needing assistance. We monitored local Facebook pages and we did check on two people who were mentioned as vulnerable on social media – one 93 year old woman had a generator and warm blankets and was fine, and we checked on another person who was mentioned who was also fine.”

According to both Conner and Mitchell, the City mostly relies on Red Cross to provide supplies if they were to open an emergency shelter. “They know what needs to be done when they get here,” explained Conner. “They have the cots and blankets. They have the food and supplies. They have the proper advertising to let people know the resource is available. We have a small amount of supplies in the Red Cross trailer at the Fire Station, but we don’t have enough to support a large array of people. We’re not going to bring Red Cross out if it’s just for a couple people.”

“We also have a shelter available in St. Helens, so if we did have two or three people telling us they needed assistance, we would find transportation and get them over there, rather than open our own,” added Conner.

Mitchell noted that opening a shelter is somewhat complex and would require monitoring. “If the shelter was at the school, the school would have to have an employee on duty and the City would also have to have someone on site,” said Mitchell. “Then you also have to consider provisions, and who is responsible for paying for those.”

Mitchell added all the local agencies involved were in contact during the power outage and were monitoring the situation.

Conner said that if an outage looks like it is going to be longer than 12 hours, they will open a local shelter. “We just didn’t have any request or a real need,” said Conner about the recent power outage.

Mitchell did say that this most recent situation did identify some legis-

tic issues between the City, Fire Department, School and other resource groups that need to be addressed. She specifically noted how an emergency shelter would deal with pets as a concern. “Maybe there is a group in the community that would like to work with us, and help us deal with that in the event of a big emergency,” said Mitchell.

Both Conner and Mitchell emphasized that anyone that is concerned about their safety or the safety of someone else in the community during winter weather events should contact the Vernonia Police through the non-emergency police dispatch, (503) 397-1521. “Call us,” said Conner. “We’ll let you know what the resources are that are available. If we hear from enough people, we’ll open a local shelter.”

## Police Blotter • January 1-16, 2017

### ARRESTS/REPORTS TAKEN

- January 3, 2017 Arrest on a Warrant near Keasey Rd.
- January 4, 2017 Arrest for Disorderly Conduct and Harassment near Rose Ave
- January 11, 2017 Arrest on a Warrant near Nehalem HWY S
- January 14, 2017 Arrest on a Warrant

near Bridge St.

### CITATIONS/OTHER

- January 14, 2017 Cited for Driving While Suspended near Bridge St.
- January 14, 2017 Cited for Failure to Obey a Traffic Control Device near Bridge St.

**Vernonia Police Department responds to calls that do not always end in Arrest, Report, or Citation. 01/01/2017 through 01/16/2017 VPD had 158 calls for service.**

**The Vernonia Transfer Station is open on the 2nd and 4th Saturday from 8am-2pm**

**January 21 & 28**  
*(January 21 is a change in schedule)*  
**February 11 & 25**

*Dates and times are subject to change due to weather*

## Vernonia City Council Meetings and Closures

**City Council Meetings are scheduled for 7:00 pm:**

Monday, February 6, 2017  
Tuesday, February 21, 2017

**City Closures are scheduled for:**

Monday, February 20, 2017  
*Presidents’ Day Holiday*

*Dates and times subject to change*

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12-4 Sun