

School Board Begins Review of Proposed Bond Expenditure Priorities

Board sets two dates for public meetings on June 22 and 24

At the regularly scheduled June 8, 2017 School Board meeting, the Vernonia School Board began the process of reviewing the proposed expenditures authorized by voters with the approval of the \$6.8 million school bond on May 14.

The approved school bond, which will include \$2.3 million in matching grant funds through the state's Oregon School Capital Improvement Matching fund, included a list of potential projects the funding would be used for.

The School Board reviewed a list of 13 potential projects prepared by District Superintendent Aaron Miller at the June 8 meeting. The Board agreed to host two public meetings to allow input on priorities and hear about pos-

sible expertise from their patrons. Those meetings were scheduled for Thursday, June 22 at 7:00 pm and Saturday, June 24 at 1:00 pm at the Vernonia Schools Library.

The District cannot add any new projects to the list, and can only use the funds for projects approved by voters in the bond measure.

Recently re-elected School Board Chair Brett Costley noted that he expects the bond expenditure priorities to be on the agenda on all upcoming School Board meetings. The next regular meeting is scheduled for July 13 at 6:00 pm in the Schools Library.

The list of potential projects are as follows:

1. Pay off \$4.5 million in construction debt
2. Repairs, maintenance, heating/cooling system, playground equipment and security system at Mist School
3. Welding Shop

4. Playground equipment at the Vernonia Schools
5. Classroom and sports storage areas, and a trophy case
6. Vernonia Schools security upgrades
7. Vernonia Schools energy upgrades
8. Cross Country/Fitness trail
9. Technology upgrades
10. Art classroom
11. Track and football field
12. Solar Panels
13. Four classrooms

Superintendent Miller told the Board that the bond will be sold in mid-July and funds would not be available until late fall, but the state matching funds would be available sooner. Miller said he hoped to begin some repairs at Mist School this summer.

The Board agreed that paying off the \$4.5 million debt would be the top priority, followed by the repairs at the Mist School.

Columbia Century Challenge Comes to Vernonia

Annual bike ride starts in Vernonia this year on June 17

Cycle Columbia County will hold their second annual Columbia Century Challenge bicycle ride on Saturday, June 17, 2017. The one day event starts and ends in Vernonia's Spencer Park, and will take about two hundred riders around the county to enjoy the scenic beauty, country backroads, and unique communities of Columbia County.

The Columbia Century Challenge will once again showcase both a Century Plus, a 119 mile loop with 6,500 feet of elevation gain, and a Metric Century Plus, an 86 mile loop with 4,000 feet of elevation gain. They have added an additional route option this year – a 40 mile ride with 1,700 feet of elevation gain that will feature 55% of the ride on forest logging roads, including the Crown-Zellerbach Trail.

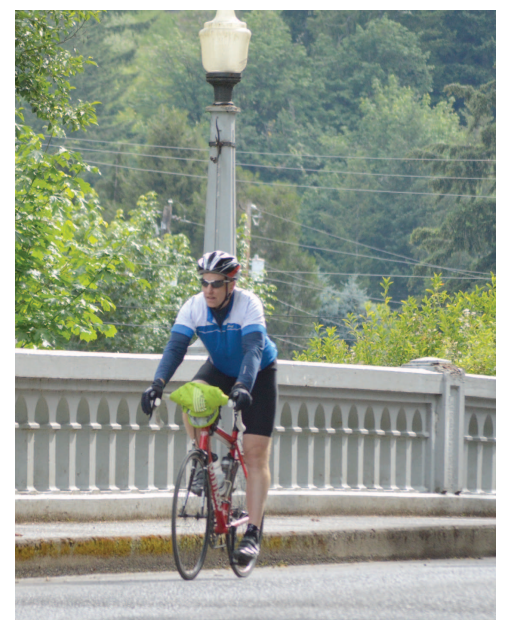
Organized by a local team of cycling enthusiasts and graduates of the Ford

Institute Leadership program, all committed to Columbia County communities, the ride is fully supported with rest stops approximately every 15 miles. This year the ride starts and ends in Vernonia and will visit the communities of Mist, Clatskanie, Rainier, St. Helens, and Scappoose.

All proceeds will be driven back into Columbia County to strengthen bike friendliness, cycling safety, and access (e.g. infrastructure like bike racks, signage, trail improvements, etc.) with the goal of reaping the well-

documented economic benefits of bike tourism and the health benefits of bicycling!

The Columbia Century Challenge was named 2nd Best Bike Ride by ORbike.com in 2016, the inaugural year of the ride. Bill Langmaid, Vernonia's representative to the Challenge, said "It's too easy to just cruise right through town. A bike is the perfect vehicle to permit visitors the time to soak up the friendliness, beauty, and historical significance of Vernonia and Columbia County."



Vernonia's Voice turns 10!
See pages 3 and 9 for photo highlights



"We Will Because We Can" weekend proves to be an inspiration and success

By Scott Laird
A large group of energetic, compassionate and committed women took the city of Vernonia by storm on the first weekend of June. Under beautiful blue skies with sunny weather, they hit the streets, literally, riding bikes, and raising awareness for a cause they all feel very strongly about, cancer awareness.



The inaugural "We Will Because We Can" event was held in Vernonia May 31-June 2. The multi-faceted weekend, which centered on various bicycle rides, was created by Carol Lamb and friends, as a way to raise awareness about breast cancer, as a celebration for all cancer survivors, and as support and healing for family and friends of cancer survivors. The event was based at Cedar Ridge Retreat Center, and included workshops, entertainment, meals, and the bike rides.

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Vernonia's "First Friday" well-received

Vernonia's very first "First Friday" artwalk was considered successful by all those in attendance on Friday June 1st. About six downtown merchants took part in the monthly celebration of the Arts that was being introduced in Vernonia for the first time. The inaugural event was held from 6 to 8 pm, and featured art displays, snacks, music, and extended shop hours by merchants.

The center of activity seemed to be the Community Learning Center, where about 20-25 people were engaged and could be seen viewing paintings by local artists, Diane Campbell, whose work was also on display across the street at DeVore. Also on display at the Learning Center was work by Albert Goss who is the father of local resident Erik Goss, and garden stepping stones, created by the First Institute Leadership class, which are being sold as a fund-raiser for their class project (see related story on page 1). "This was great!" said Jesse Jones, Director of the Learning Center. "There were so many people here out for the first event."

Other merchants who participated in the evening event were: Out on a Limb and Blackberry Cottage, who featured photography by Evangeline Doyle of the Madison School; Sunday's Best, featuring art painting by Mihly; One Three Gallery, featuring work by Christopher Anderson; and Black Bear Coffee shop, with Sally Harrison signing copies of her postcard book for children.

The event was organized by city Recorder Kate Cooley who was inspired by a similar event held in Grants Pass. The event was held to encourage residents and visitors to walk the downtown streets, socialize and share food, shop at the local stores, and enjoy a variety of artistic styles and events. The next "First Friday" event will be held on July 6th.

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State Investigates Ethics Complaint Against Mayor

The Oregon Government Ethics Commission has announced they will investigate possible government ethics law violations by Vernonia Mayor Mario Leonetti.

Following a preliminary review the Ethics Commission released a report, prepared by state investigator Michael Thornicroft dated May 15, 2017 and released on June 2. The report stated "...Mr. Leonetti, who owns a restaurant in Vernonia, may have had a potential or actual conflict of interest in discussing the regulation and siting of food cart vendors and may have failed to handle the conflict as required by ORS 244.120."

The complaint was filed by a citizen on April 17, 2017 following the citizen's request to place a food cart owned by them on a specific piece of property owned by the City at 490

Bridge Street, next to the Bridge Street Mini Mart. An original complaint, filed by the same individual that included additional accusations against other members of the Vernonia City Council, was rejected by the Ethics Commission upon initial review as having "no merit."

The complaint alleges that Mayor Leonetti, who owns Mariolino's restaurant on Madison Avenue, participated in discussions and decisions regarding placement and costs associated with food carts at City Council meetings on February 13, March 13, March 20 and April 3 without announcing a conflict of interest when discussing the issue.

The request to place a food cart was withdrawn by the citizen before any decision was made by the City Council on the issue and prior to the

March 20, 2017 City Council meeting. At that meeting the City Council voted against placing any food carts at the requested location, but agreed to move forward with preparing a different site for food carts at the Corner of Bridge Street and Grant Avenue, the site of the former Health Clinic, less than a block away from the originally requested site.

The Ethics Commission report notes that at a meeting on March 6, Leonetti did state he had a conflict of interest, which is reflected in the City Council minutes from that meeting. At the February 13 meeting Mayor Leonetti acknowledged owning a restaurant and other Council members referenced his ownership, but Leonetti failed to officially announce any conflict of interest. According to the report, minutes and audio recordings

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