

Salem Report

By Representative Brad Witt



This session, we had not only an opportunity, but a moral obligation to rebuild the broken pieces of our budget and revenue systems,

which have been crumbling for more than two decades. The Joint Committee on Tax Reform has spent several months trying to put together a sweeping reform of the way we do taxation in Oregon. Recently we were informed that the Committee could not come to an agreement on the proposals before them, so unless something changes soon, they have indicated that tax reform will have to wait until our next full session in 2019. I firmly believe that the Committee's initial attempts were grounded in reality: the need for a serious re-evaluation of the role of corporate taxation in

our state, along with an equally serious program of cost containment. Unfortunately, it does not appear that a solution is achievable at this time.

We did, however, have the opportunity to consider a bill that adjusts the tax rate on small businesses, HB 2060. Back in 2013, tax rates for this segment of the economy were lowered in order to encourage job creation. HB 2060 changes some of the parameters of the tax brackets so that only businesses employing 10 or more employees will be able to qualify, thus raising the rates on those employing fewer than 10 employees back up to pre-2013 rates. Although the bill also targeted certain sectors such as agriculture, food service, warehousing, etc., that are prevalent in my district, I could not support a bill that would end up targeting the smallest of these businesses that may already find it difficult to compete. The bill did pass on a narrow 31-28 margin, and is

now over in the Senate.

Graduation is now complete for the schools in my district, and I just wanted to extend my congratulations to all of the graduates. I hope your future is filled with accomplishment. I also hope that you will remember the importance of public service as you build your professional and personal lives. Wherever you live, your community will need your enthusiasm, creativity and generosity. You will gain more than you give, I promise.

It's parade and festival time! I was so please to be able to participate in the St. Helens Kiwanis Parade on Saturday, June 17. It was a great day, lots of participants as well as onlookers, and no rain! I will be joining in the Clatskanie Celebration on the 4th, assuming we are not in the Capitol! Around the district Vernonia and St. Helens also have festivals and fireworks to celebrate our independence.

City Council Considers Plan for Street Repairs *continued from front page*

based on analysis of the street condition data. Streets and alleys in marginal or poor condition within each area were evaluated and the current condition, prescribed treatment and preliminary estimated costs for resurfacing, and stormwater improvements were provided in the report.

"The goal of any city would be to get those streets rated 'poor and marginal' addressed within one to two years," said Mitchell.

The report notes that the City currently has approximately \$100,000 in the streets operating budget for repaving and upgrading streets, with an estimated cost for surface improvements of \$2-\$3 per square foot. The revenue for this fund comes entirely from the City's allotment of the state gas tax. The City has no stormwater operating budget. While System Development Charge (SDC) funds of \$62,000 are available, these funds must be used for new stormwater improvements or to increase capacity. Any stormwater projects included in a street project, which do not qualify for SDC use, will need to be paid out of the streets operating budget.

The report does offer several options for funding street condition improvements. General obligation

bonds would need to be passed by voters, while a debt service bond could be approved by the Council. The Council could decide to charge a monthly fee on the City utility bill that would be dedicated to streets and storm water, similar to the \$2 parks fee currently being charged. The City could also consider creating Local Improvement Districts (LIDs) which are special taxing districts voted on by the land owners in the area to generate funds for a particular set of improvements. The report notes that the City of Vernonia has not had previous experience with LIDs.

At the workshop, the Council reviewed the report and began the process of discussing priority areas for improvements.

"The Council asked staff to get estimates for the costs to fix the streets rated 'poor,'" said Mitchell. "They also asked for estimates for streets that provide connectivity around Louisiana Avenue and for staff to look for grant funding for that, because those streets service a large number of houses and there is more development happening up there."

Mitchell noted that some of the streets that were rated poor are currently gravel which will be easier to address on a tight budget. She said the

City has already begun the process of receiving estimates from several paving companies for some of the potential work.

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