

Vernonia School District Begins Budget Process

The Vernonia School District (VSD) Budget Committee met by teleconference on Thursday, April 30, 2020 and began their budget process for the 2020-21 fiscal year.

The Budget Committee is made up of the six current members of the School Board – Chair Greg Kintz, Vice Chair Stacey Pelster, and Board members Susan Wagner, Steve Whiteman, Brittanie Roberts, and Jeana Gump (there is currently one vacant seat on the Board), along with two community members – Kellie Murray and Kimberly Titus (there are currently five vacant community seats).

Kellie Murray was elected to serve as Chairperson of the Budget Committee and Susan Wagner was elected as Vice Chair.

The Budget was prepared by Superintendent Aaron Miller and Business Manager Marie Knight. Superintendent Miller will serve as the Budget Officer for the budget process.

The General Fund includes revenue of \$8,395,870 which is based on the State School Fund (SSF) estimate of \$7,373,670, using the Governor's Budget of \$9 billion, and the District's beginning fund balance. The District receives funding from the State based on the number of students they project to be enrolled in the upcoming school year. VSD is estimating enrollment for the 2020-21 school year at 555, which includes students enrolled in the Vernonia Family Academy; the VSD had 573 students enrolled in 2020. Miller said the conservative number projected for the next year takes into account a large class of seniors this year, and said if enrollment is higher it would be an advantage to the District.

During the initial meeting of the Budget Committee, Superintendent Miller addressed concerns about the COVID-19 shutdown and its impact on the VSD budget. "At this point we don't know what that impact

is, which is why we continue to base our funding and expenditures on the \$9 billion number that came from the Governor in February," said Miller. He went on to say that he and Knight will develop a contingency plan that includes places to make cuts if there is a funding shortfall from the state.

Proposed changes from the 2019-20 budget include contractual increases for salaries and associated payroll costs; one additional student contact day paid from the general fund, two additional student contact days and one additional staff only contract day funded by the Student Investment Account (SIA); two added licensed teaching positions – one at the Vernonia Family Academy and one Vernonia High School math instructor, funded through the SIA.

The General Fund budget includes a contingency fund and an unappropriated ending fund balance totaling \$360,000, 4.29% of the general fund budget – this represents an increase of approximately 1% from 2019-20. Ideally, these funds should be at 5% of the general fund. This budget also includes a special section designated for revenue and planned expenditures of the District's \$515,000 Student Investment Account allocation from Oregon Department of Education (ODE), through the passage of the SIA. This allocation will provide much needed funding to the District to increase capacity to meet the academic needs of traditionally underserved students, and the social/emotional needs of all students.

Personnel expenses are a large portion of the general fund program costs for instruction, support, and administrative functions. Payroll costs continue to rise and are one of the most pressing concerns for the District as they attempt to balance student needs with the provision of a realistic compensation package for staff.

Estimated employer rates for the Public Em-

ployees Retirement System (PERS) increased in July 2019, while rates remain stable for 2020-21 in this second year of the biennium. 2020-21 rates are 32.03% of salary for Tier 1 and 2 employees and 26.58% for OPSRP employees.

Revenues come from two main sources: state funding and local property taxes. The state revenue, local property taxes, and timber revenue are components of the State School Fund (SSF), which make up approximately 88% of all General Fund revenue.

The Budget Committee will review the proposed budget, make recommended changes, and send an approved budget to the School Board for final approval, which is expected to take place during the June 11 School Board meeting. The Budget Committee will meet again on May 14.

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management and support. This software will enable the City to better control and maintain all City of Vernonia records.

Police Department Report – Chief Conner told the Council he has hired Dave Brown to fill a vacant officer position. Brown is from Columbia County and recently ran for Columbia County Sheriff.

City Administrator Report – City Administrator Josette Mitchell told the Council she is having discussions with the Jamboree Committee and Vernonia Intercultural Society about whether there will be any events this summer. No final decisions have been made.

The Threat Below Mount St. Helens *continued from page 7*

nance, the Forest Service suggested an additional alternative to the road: bringing in equipment and personnel via helicopter. But in early April, the agency decided to go ahead with the road, and Strebig hopes that the work, which could take up to five years, will begin this summer.

Scientists prefer using helicopters, arguing that they would minimize the impact on research while still allowing for drilling and maintenance work. "No one is opposed to the project, but the Forest Service needs to find a better alternative than building a road," said Carri LeRoy, an ecologist at The Evergreen State College who studies five new watersheds that formed on the Pumice Plain post-eruption. She recently received a big grant from the National Science Foundation, and the proposed road would cross all five watersheds, ending her project before it can really begin.

But the helicopter alternative, with its tougher logistics and higher price, was a hard sell. A few scientists who attended planning meetings late last year left fearing a decision had already been made. "I just came away with a sense that (the Forest Service) is bound and determined to build that road," LeRoy said.

In outreach meetings, too, Forest Service officials have talked up the destructive mudflow Spirit Lake could unleash, showing pictures of flooded towns from 1980 while de-emphasizing that such an outcome is only a distant possibility. The project is being sold to the public as essential for safety reasons, according to Arne Mortensen, a commissioner for Cowlitz County, where the downstream towns are located. "Absent a near-term and long-term cost analysis to show otherwise," he wrote in an

email, "using the road approach looks better."

Scientists fear that they were subtly scapegoated, and the importance of their studies brushed aside, in an effort to cut costs. "I'm worried they're just paying lip service to researchers' concerns," LeRoy said. Hoffman, the monument manager, denies this: "We're working with specific researchers, and will continue to work with the research community to limit the amount of impact that occurs," she said.

But Susan Saul, a conservationist with the Washington Native Plant Society who was instrumental in getting the blast area designated a national monument, said project planners have been cavalier about the road's possible impacts on research. For example, a Forest Service staffer wrote that the physical environment "will have returned to baseline" within two years of the project's completion. To Saul, that phrasing betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the relationship between science and the landscape at Mount St. Helens. Ecologists want to study how life responds after an eruption. But a road will change everything, with effects that extend far beyond its physical footprint: Vehicles crush vegetation, ferry in introduced species and change animal behavior, among other things. Slap a road through the Pumice Plain, and the research there would effectively be reduced to how life responds after a road is built — a much less interesting project. "So it seems like the writer wasn't taking the research seriously," Saul said.

For ecologists, this seriousness, or its lack, could have profound consequences. What is the value of a monument devoted to the processes of disturbance and ecological succession

if those processes are themselves irrevocably disturbed? That is a question as yet unstudied, but as Crisafulli, the Forest Service ecologist, points out, no one has invested more in the research at Mount St. Helens than the federal government. "The agency has spent millions of dollars on multiple studies for the past four decades," he said. "There's no getting around the fact that building a road

through the heart of it would put that legacy at risk."

This article was originally published in High Country News on May 1, 2020. Eric Wagner lives in Seattle with his family. His book After the Blast: The Ecological Recovery of Mount St. Helens was published in April by the University of Washington Press.

FORM LB-1 NOTICE OF BUDGET HEARING			
A public meeting of the Board of Directors will be held on May 21, 2020 at 7 pm via virtual meeting at https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/833536261 or Toll Free 1-866-899-4676 Access Code: 833-536-261. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2020 as approved by the Mist-Birkenfeld Rural Fire Protection District Budget Committee. A summary of the budget is presented below. A copy of the budget may be inspected or obtained at Main Station, between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. or online at https://www.mistbirkenfeldrfd.org/20-21-budget-information . This budget is for an annual budget period. This budget was prepared on a basis of accounting that is the same as the preceding year.			
Contact: Joe Kaczinski	Telephone: (503)755-2710	Email: Joek@mistbirkenfeldrfd.org	
FINANCIAL SUMMARY - RESOURCES			
TOTAL OF ALL FUNDS	Actual Amount 2018-2019	Adopted Budget This Year 2019-2020	Approved Budget Next Year 2020-2021
Beginning Fund Balance/Net Working Capital	745,895.75	787,999.00	972,645.00
Fees, Licenses, Permits, Fines, Assessments & Other Service Charges	30,633.02	34,700.00	44,600.00
Federal, State & all Other Grants, Gifts, Allocations & Donations	86,526.68	63,000.00	63,000.00
Revenue from Bonds and Other Debt	0.00	0.00	0.00
Interfund Transfers / Internal Service Reimbursements	70,000.00	50,000.00	150,000.00
All Other Resources Except Current Year Property Taxes	37,813.84	39,500.00	38,500.00
Current Year Property Taxes Estimated to be Received	371,124.19	486,846.00	499,000.00
Total Resources	1,341,999.48	1,462,045.00	1,767,745.00
FINANCIAL SUMMARY - REQUIREMENTS BY OBJECT CLASSIFICATION			
Personnel Services	386,087.09	557,000.00	591,000.00
Materials and Services	146,038.67	183,550.00	211,050.00
Capital Outlay	151,375.40	482,800.00	627,000.00
Debt Service	0.00	0.00	0.00
Interfund Transfers	70,000.00	50,000.00	150,000.00
Contingencies	0.00	184,695.00	184,695.00
Special Payments	0.00	0.00	0.00
Unappropriated Ending Balance and Reserved for Future Expenditure	4,000.00	4,000.00	4,000.00
Total Requirements	757,501.16	1,462,045.00	1,767,745.00
FINANCIAL SUMMARY - REQUIREMENTS AND FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT EMPLOYEES (FTE) BY ORGANIZATIONAL UNIT OR PROGRAM *			
Fire & Emergency Services			
FTE for that unit or program			
Fire Service	310,142.72	435,000.00	460,000.00
FTE	4.05	4.95	5
Name			
FTE			
Name			
FTE			
Not Allocated to Organizational Unit or Program			
FTE			
Total Requirements	310,142.72	435,000.00	460,000.00
Total FTE	4.05	4.95	5
STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN ACTIVITIES and SOURCES OF FINANCING *			
M-B RFPD has sub-contracted a part-time Recruitment & Retention Coordinator. More money is added to the Capital Reserve fund to aid in replacing older apparatus and equipment. Capital Outlay is being funded for Capital Improvements such as replacement of bathroom/showroom floors and new roofing.			
PROPERTY TAX LEVIES			
	Rate or Amount Imposed 2018-2019	Rate or Amount Imposed This Year 2019-2020	Rate or Amount Approved Next Year 2020-2021
Permanent Rate Levy (rate limit 2.0875 per \$1,000)	2.0875	2.0875	2.0875
Local Option Levy	0	0	0
Levy For General Obligation Bonds	0	0	0
STATEMENT OF INDEBTEDNESS			
LONG TERM DEBT	Estimated Debt Outstanding on July 1,	Estimated Debt Authorized, But Not Incurred on July 1	
General Obligation Bonds	\$0	\$0	
Other Bonds	\$0	\$0	
Other Borrowings	\$0	\$0	
Total	\$0	\$0	