

Council Votes to Begin Holding Meetings In-Person

The Vernonia City Council made what could be considered a surprising decision on Monday, at their November 16, 2020 meeting, when they voted 3-2 to begin holding public council meetings in-person, beginning with their scheduled December 7 meeting.

The Council had been meeting virtually since the beginning of the COVID pandemic.

Recently re-elected Mayor Rick Hobart pushed for the change, and joined Councilors Bruce McNair and J.R. Allen in approving the move. Councilors Susan Wagner and Dale Webb voted against it.

The move was surprising for a number of reasons. Oregon and Columbia County have seen a sharp rise recently in the number of positive COVID cases reported, and Oregon Governor Kate Brown recently imposed increased restrictions on public and private gatherings to help slow the spread.

Council meetings often take two to three hours to complete and are

held in the Council Chambers in City Hall, a room with limited seating capacity. Staff told Council arranging for a hybrid meeting that includes both in-person and virtual access could be a challenge.

The vote took place at the first meeting of the Council following the November 3 election in which two of the current Council members (McNair and Wagner) did not win their re-election bids, so the Council made the decision without consulting the two newly elected members who will be sworn-in at the first Council meeting in January.

During the discussion prior to the vote, City Administrator Josette Mitchell told the Council she will not attend meetings in-person due to personal health reasons if there is public attendance.

The decision could also go against Oregon's Public Meetings laws due to the limited number of citizens who could safely attend meetings if physical distancing rules are followed.

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Oregon's Rural Red Wave

A closer look at regional votes shows the influence of Timber Unity and a surge in support for Republican and conservative candidates

By Scott Laird

In the November 3, 2020 election Oregon Democrats won every statewide race, regaining the Secretary of State position, and holding the State Treasurer and Attorney General seats. They also retained a supermajority in the state legislature and will once again control the House and the Senate.

But that cursory look at Oregon's election results doesn't tell the

whole story, especially when you look at the results in rural areas, particularly in western Oregon.

While Republicans may not have unseated House District 31 Democrat Brad Witt, the number of votes Republican challenger Brian Stout received should send a clear message to Democrats in Columbia County and Oregon – there is a rural red wave forming here.

At the heart of that red wave is Timber Unity, an organization focused on jobs and the economy, that is forcing legislators in Salem to start paying attention and take their issues seriously.

"We are an organization who, regardless of people's other political beliefs, are focused on the core issue of jobs – that public policy shouldn't

Shop Local and Support Your Friends and Neighbors

This year of COVID has been rough on everyone, but it's been especially hard for small, local businesses. People have been staying home, and they've also been shopping from home. So while your friends and neighbors who own small businesses have been struggling, large corporations have been profiting.

According to a recent Fortune magazine article, 21% of all U.S. businesses have closed for good since the start of the pandemic, and small-business revenue is down roughly 30% for the year. Meanwhile, the stock market is surging and big corporations and big box stores like Walmart, Target, and Amazon have seen profits double.

Small and midsize businesses are important to our economy. They employ about half the workforce and generate about half of our GDP. For every dollar you spend in a small, locally owned business, 58 cents stays in that community, while only 33 cents stay when you spend at a large corporate business.



The upcoming holiday shopping season gives all of us a chance to help correct this disparity. If you plan to make purchases in the next month, please consider making them at a small, locally owned, family run business.

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reduce jobs," says Julie Parrish, a Timber Unity volunteer board member and former four-term state representative from West Linn. "That's why Timber Unity originally formed, and we feel we've been successful in pushing back on legislation that would put people out of business."

Timber Unity got actively involved in a number of political races this year as a Political Action Committee (PAC), campaigning extensively for candidates they felt represented their values. Parrish says those candidates were not necessarily always Republicans. "We made our legislative questionnaire available to any candidate who wanted to participate in our process," she explains. "We did endorse a few democratic can-

didates in some primaries, although they did not win the nomination. We are not affiliated with any political party. We're an issue specific group, not a party group. We certainly have members who are more conservative, but we also have folks who voted for Joe Biden."

Timber Unity's election involvement did have an impact, not just in state legislature races where they did help turn several seats red, but also at the local and national level where they may not have won but they did effect the vote counts. Take a look at the these election results:

- In the previously mentioned race for Oregon House District 31, which includes Columbia County and parts of

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Boots on The Ground Fundraiser

Vernonia Christian Church is asking the community to help them raise money for local firefighters and Oregon fire relief

The Vernonia Christian Church is kicking off a holiday fundraising effort with an eye on helping the Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District better equip their volunteers.

"Boots on the Ground" will be the church's annual Christmas Offering, a project the congregation takes on each year to raise money for a good cause.

This year Vernonia Christian Church Pastor Sam Hough says the congregation is taking on a large project and is inviting the rest of the Vernonia community to help them reach their goals.

"We wanted to give our church and our community something to get excited about," said Pastor Hough. "We wanted to do something that would be fun and to bring people together in a time when there's been a lot of trouble. And we wanted to bless our firefighters. They've really been heroes during this past year. We know our local department has a lot of needs and we wanted to recognize them and try to help them. And we wanted to help support the people around

the state who also have needs right now."

The first goal is to raise \$7,200. \$5,000 of that will be used to purchase 10 new helmets and eight new pairs of leather boots for volunteer firefighters in the community. \$1,000 will go to International Disaster and Emergency Services (IDES), a world mission group that helps meet the physical and spiritual needs of people suffering around the world; the donation will specifically be designated to further their work helping people affected by the wildfires in Oregon this summer. Another \$1,000 will go the Oregon Christian Evangelistic Fellowship (OCEF) Church Planters program, an Oregon group ministering to communities impacted by the wildfires.

If the church reaches that initial goal, they will work towards a "Miracle Goal" of raising an additional \$1,800 to purchase one new turnout for the fire department; turnouts are the protective pants, jacket, and gloves firefighters wear.

If that goal is reached, then the group will move on to a "Miracle Miracle Goal" of raising an additional \$3,500 to purchase three additional sets of turnouts for Vernonia firefighting volunteers.

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