

from the editor

The results from our local Vernonia elections on November 3 for two City Council seats contained a bit of a surprise. Incumbents Bruce McNair and Susan Wagner both lost their bids for re-election and Lorna Poetter and Grant Williams were elected, while Mayor Rick Hobart retained his seat after running unopposed.

I say "a bit of a surprise" because both McNair and Wagner have been great public servants who have helped guide the City through several challenging projects and accomplish some very important, long-term goals.

The City of Vernonia is currently experiencing a stretch of some very professional leadership under City Administrator Josette Mitchell and the staff with which she has surrounded herself. The budget is stable, turnover has slowed, and projects are being completed. This continuity at City Hall was almost unimaginable five year ago after the City went through a series of leadership changes.

The volunteer and elected City Council oversees the City staff and gives them direction, along with setting policy, and they've basically been effective in this regard. Things are good in city governance at the moment.

Bruce McNair was first selected

by a panel of citizens to fill an empty seat and serve on the City Council in 2011. He was elected to a four year term in 2016. During his time on the Council, I've watched McNair grow into the position, and become one of the best City Councilor in recent memory. He has spent his time working for the citizens of this community, working to reorganize the Memorial Cemetery and get it financially stable, complete the Wastewater System Upgrade which resulted in a reduction of the City Utility bill of over \$20, and helped in the completion of the Senior Center/Vernonia Cares project. He has been a tireless worker who asks questions and challenges staff to find better, cheaper, or more efficient ways to do things. Prior to being elected he served as a community member on the City Budget Committee, and his understanding of the City finances have been a real asset to the Council. While on the Council he served first as the liaison to the Public Works Committee and then to the Cemetery Committee and both those departments benefitted from his hard work and knowledge. In the beginning, McNair was a bit rough around the edges and his blunt style of governance wasn't always appreciated by staff and his fellow Council members, but he has shown the capacity to learn, grow, and

change his approach to be more effective.

Susan Wagner was elected to the Council in 2016 and has provided a unique perspective based on her previous service on the City Planning Commission, on the City Budget Committee, and as an elected member of the Vernonia School Board. She too has worked hard and helped establish steady and professional leadership, something that the City of Vernonia surely needed.

Which is why the changes we've seen in the last two elections are a surprise, and quite frankly disappointing. Usually citizens choose to make leadership changes when they are unhappy with the results their elected officials are providing. Two years ago citizens voted out Councilor Mike Seager, and chose Hobart as Mayor over Councilor Jill Hult, who had also been an asset to the City. This year voters chose two newcomers over the incumbents.

Good city government is mostly a function of having solid leadership in

the professional positions and Vernonia has established that recently. But having a good elected Council, who are willing and able to serve effectively is also important. Constant change in those positions erodes institutional knowledge, and integrating new leaders into a working body that has established priorities and goals, and is working well together, takes time.

I appreciate both Lorna Poetter and Grant Williams for being willing to step up, run for office, and take on this responsibility, and I wish them well. I hope they can show the same dedication their predecessors have shown; they have big shoes to fill.

I also want to applaud and thank both Councilors Bruce McNair and Susan Wagner for their service and leadership. The Vernonia community is a better place today thanks to them.

Scott Laird
Editor and Publisher

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Here at *Vernonia's Voice*, we too have been impacted, just like many other local businesses. In order to publish your local newspaper, we depend solely on advertising revenue from other local businesses, non-profits, and community events. The cancelation of events like the Friendship Jamboree and Quilt Fair have affected us directly.

We understand how difficult it is for a local business in a small town to succeed and thrive during normal circumstances, and how challenging it's been to survive during COVID. We appreciate our local businesses and especially

those who support us with their hard earned advertising dollars, and because of that our advertising rates have remained unchanged since 2014 so we can continue to be affordable. We also regularly offer substantial discounts to community groups so they can get the word out about their activities and events.

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Scott Laird
Editor and Publisher

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