

City prepares for annual budget sessions

By CRAIG MURPHY
Of the Keizertimes

When the calendar turns to May, that means two things each year in Keizer.

The more obvious one is the annual Keizer Iris Festival, which officially kicks off with the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast on May 7 but really gets going on May 14.

The slightly less obvious thing each May: budget season.

The Keizer Long Range Planning Task Force – or Keizer Budget Committee – met for the first time in 2015 on April 13, a meeting that essentially previewed the budget season.

The budget committee will go over the budget in public meetings on May 5, 7 and 12. All meetings will begin at 6 p.m. in council chambers at Keizer Civic Center, 930 Chemawa Road NE. If needed, there will be a fourth meeting on May 19.

"This is what drives our long-term plan," assistant controller Tim Wood said while leading committee members through preliminary numbers last month.

One of the hot topics of conversation was projected population growth. City staff is projecting a "moderate" population increase of 1.5 percent for the long term, even though average growth over the past five years has been an average of less than 1 percent per year. The population increase in 2014-15, for example, was .52 percent.

"We're starting to see more permit activity than in previous years, which hints to a population increase of more than we've had," city manager Chris Eppley said.

Nate Brown, director of Community Development, confirmed that was the case.

"We have seen significant permit activity, the last month in particular," Brown said. "But we're also up against Urban Growth Boundary constraints. The economy seems to be picking up, but we're constrained by other things. Moderate is a prudent approach."

Keizer City Councilor Brandon Smith called the projections into question.

"We had a .5 percent increase (this year), but the mod-

erate is 1.5 percent," Smith said. "To me that seems aggressive."

Brown responded that in the three weeks prior to the meeting, the city received 27 single family home permits.

"We haven't seen those numbers for a while," Brown said. "The economy is picking up. People are recognizing Keizer is very desirable."

Councilor Amy Ripp noted eight new housing developments, plus more assisted living and apartment complexes being built.

"We're already looking at significant growth this year," Ripp said. "My calculations were 1,100 new door steps this year."

Councilor Marlene Quinn pointed to a lack of vacancies with current apartment complexes.

"I did five apartment complexes on research," Quinn said. "There were zero vacancies. They all have waiting lists. There are no apartments. If all those new apartments got built in the next year, I think at least 90 percent would be filled."

Mayor Cathy Clark liked

hearing the numbers.

"The vacancy rate speaks to two things: there is high interest in people moving to Keizer because it's a desirable place to live and also the resources people have," Clark said. "If we had more space, more people would come. We don't have space for high growth."

Wood also gave updates on other projections. In the stormwater fund, the projected Equivalent Service Unit (ESU) rate increase is \$.40 for 2015-16, then an increase of \$.50 per ESU for each of the next three years. Susan Gahlsdorf, finance director for the city, estimated the increase means customers will see an increase of \$1 every other month in the bill.

In the water services fund, Wood said the projected increase for 2015-16 is 4 percent, a rate expected to increase to 5 percent for the 2018-19 fiscal year.

The tight budget originally cut out the Keizer Parks and Recreation Advisory Board's matching grant program, which started last July with \$14,000. That money is effectively dou-

bled as Parks Board members have been awarding funds to groups willing to match the funds with their own labor or materials.

Shortly after news of the cut went public, however, figures were revised and the matching grant program was back in the budget, albeit at a lower \$10,000 amount.

"Numbers are less unfavorable than they were and we've been able to add the parks grant program back in to the proposed budget," Eppley said. "Many other cuts stand fast, but that one we wanted to get reestablished as a priority."

KPAC seeks pics of old Keizer mural

The Keizer Public Arts Commission is seeking information about a mural that was painted on Albertsons (now Haggen) in the late 1980s or early 1990s. At that time Albertsons was located at River and Chemawa Roads.

The commission is seeking information and photos of the mural for historical and recreation purposes. If you have information about the mural email publisher@keizertimes.com.

Letter carrier food drive May 9

On Saturday, May 9, carriers with the United States Postal Service will help 'stamp out hunger' by collecting bags of non-perishable food from their customers.

The USPS is asking its postal customers to fill a bag with food items and place the bag by their mailbox on Saturday, May 9, for their carrier to deliver to a local food bank or pantry.

Most desired food items are canned meats, fish, soup, juice, vegetables, pasta, cereal, peanut butter and rice. They ask that no food in glass containers be donated.

Stamp Out Hunger is a nationwide program of the USPS. For more information visit Facebook.com/StampOutHunger.

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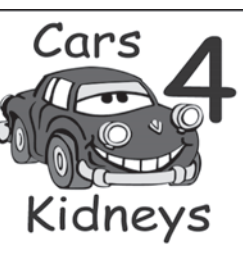
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