

Warrenton: Newton's behavior called out

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Cardinaletti, had planned to build housing units, a project the couple has since scrapped, they said.

'Stop-work orders'

City staff sent Newton stop-work orders in mid-August and early September but did not hear from him. In early November, the Planning Commission decided that Newton's unpermitted infill violated the city's development code. They gave Newton 60 days — until Jan. 4 — to remedy the violation.

But with the recent rains, the pile of fill began to cause flooding on adjacent lands, according to Planning Director Scott Hazelton. On Tuesday, Hazelton asked the commission to give Newton a shorter time frame — three days — to fix the problem.

Newton claimed the city was also partially responsible for the flooding because it removed a drainage ditch near his property, but he did not challenge the city's facts on the illegality of the fill.

Russell Cox, Newton's neighbor, whose property has been inundated, said Newton has pumped water off the property. "In my opinion, here, living in the Northwest, we all know that's just going to be a losing battle, no matter what anybody does," he said.

Newton said, "I've been doing my best to make it right."

City staff gave Newton the option of allowing city crews to correct the issue before the weekend, then send him a bill. Newton declined, saying he would not accept the city's help unless he knew in advance what it would cost him.

The fill material came

from road reconstruction work that Big River Construction was doing for the city on S.W. Alder Avenue. With Newton's blessing, the company placed the material on his property. This action — a city commissioner accepting a gift of free fill from a city project — could be viewed as an ethical breach.

During Tuesday's hearing, Newton accused the city's building official, Van Wilfinger, of lying to him. Newton said Wilfinger had told him in an email exchange that the commissioner did not need a permit to lay the fill.

City Manager Linda Engbretson, who read the emails, said she did not see evidence of lying. Rather, Wilfinger told Newton that a permit wasn't needed to lay 250 cubic yards of waste rock, which is different than the estimated 500-plus cubic yards of sand, silt and mud that sit on Newton's property.

Baldwin apologized for Newton's statements.

"I don't condone the behavior over this whole issue — personal attacks on staff members, calling them liars when there's been email threads to prove otherwise," Baldwin said. "An illegal fill is an illegal fill. It doesn't matter if it's 500 yards, 700 yards, 900 yards, 1,000 yards. We all make mistakes; how we're remembered is how we deal with them. And pointing fingers and blaming others — I don't like it."

He called Newton's actions "a huge time drain on an already overworked staff. I don't believe it should have happened, and I hope it would never happen again. So, again, I'm asking for Commissioner Newton to step down."

"Ain't gonna happen,"

Newton replied.

'No confidence'

Saying he has "no confidence" in Newton, Poe said, "Commissioner Newton's actions and decisions that have been made over the past few months, and even before that, have been affecting the commission in a way that's somewhat negative and somewhat embarrassing — pretty hard to stomach sometimes."

Balensifer pointed to Newton's efforts to contact two commissioners — Poe and Tom Dyer — and bring up the infill matter. The mayor said this was inappropriate and that Newton, a longtime member of the City Commission, should know better.

In addition, Balensifer was troubled by testimony from Cox, who said Newton had started showing up at Cox's workplace and discussing the city's involvement in the infill.

"I told Mr. Newton I couldn't speak to him anymore because I felt like I was starting to get harassed," Cox said. Newton apologized to him during the meeting.

Balensifer said, "I know that, Commissioner Newton, you have expressed that you've had some stuff that you're dealing with, and I think that it would be best if you dealt with those out of the public domain. And I would hope that you can manage those personally instead of publicly."

The mayor then joined Baldwin and Poe in asking Newton to step aside.

Over the past several months, commissioners have been concerned about Newton's interactions and public comments about city business, which have led to public and private clashes over his behavior.

Salem: Rent, drought relief OK'd in one-day session

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We came together to send relief — hope — to Oregonians in crisis."

Minority Republicans had resisted a special session, though not the rental assistance, which they said could have been approved by the state's Emergency Board.

Majority Democrats said only the full Legislature could extend the grace period for evictions. The Emergency Board cannot pass legislation.

Impetus for session

Although some cities and counties are still accepting them, the Oregon Department of Housing and Community Services stopped new applications for rental assistance after Dec. 1. Agency officials said that pending applications were likely to consume the rest of the \$289 million available from federal funds — \$180 million has been paid out to landlords as of Dec. 11 — and the state still would not have enough to cover all pending requests.

House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, called for a special session months ago.

"Today, we kept our promise and protected thousands from losing their homes this winter," she said, along with other priority items.

The \$200 million that lawmakers drew from the state budget a year ago for rental assistance has been spent. Oregon has applied for \$200 million more in federal aid from the U.S. Treasury, but that money is unlikely to come until spring — and even if it comes, it will be the last installment.

Meanwhile, more than 10,000 applications, many of them in the three Portland metro counties, are past the grace periods established by state law and county actions. State law allows 60 days from when a tenant has informed a landlord about an application being filed; in Multnomah and Washington counties and the city of Beaverton, it is 90 days.

"During wintertime, we want to make sure Oregonians are kept whole," said Sen. Kayse Jama, D-Port-

land, who leads the Senate housing panel. "We also want to make sure that landlords who are struggling get the resources they need."

Senate Republican Leader Tim Knopp, of Bend, helped broker the deal after Republicans resisted the initial call for a special session.

"We do have people with the possibility of being evicted," he said. "We do have landlords who still have to be made whole. There have been several hundred million dollars already spent."

"In order to protect them and protect landlords, the only option we have today in this emergency session is to provide these funds and that certainty to tenants in a defined period."

Dissent is voiced

A companion bill extends the grace period for tenants against evictions for non-payment of rent from Feb. 28 to June 30. The grace period goes back to April 1, 2020, at the start of the pandemic. The grace period for tenants who have shown landlords proof of application for assistance is now set at Sept. 30, or whenever the landlord receives the assistance payment.

That bill passed the Senate, 22 to 6, and the House, 37 to 18. Rep. Suzanne Weber, R-Tillamook, was among the "no" votes.

At least 10 House Republicans spoke against that bill and called on Brown to replace Margaret Salazar as leader of the state housing agency.

"House Republicans urge significant changes to these agencies under Democrat control," GOP House Leader Vikki Breese-Iverson, of Prineville, said. "We call on the governor to dramatically increase oversight to ensure this money gets to real people in need."

Brown said she is aware that the agency, plus community action agencies in the counties, must reduce the huge backlog of applications.

"While we have made significant progress in improving the delivery of rental assistance in the last several weeks, we know that renters and their landlords are counting on these additional

state resources and that we must move quickly," the governor said in a statement.

The rental assistance money was contained in a larger budget bill that included these items:

- Resettlement of up to 1,200 Afghan refugees who will start arriving in Oregon early next year — \$18 million. A task force led by Jama and Rep. Khanh Pham, D-Portland, recommended the request, which was not controversial.

- Aid to farmers and ranchers affected by the continuing drought, mostly in southern and Eastern Oregon — \$100 million. The amount is drawn from \$150 million that lawmakers already set aside in the two-year state budget for natural disasters. About \$40 million is in the form of forgivable loans and \$10 million is for specified irrigation districts.

- Efforts against large-scale illegal cannabis growing, mostly in southern Oregon — \$25 million. Most of it — \$20 million — will be made available in grants by the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission to local police agencies; \$5 million goes to the Oregon Water Resources Department for more staff to deal with illegal water use that interferes with water rights.

- A project by the Port of Portland to develop a prototype of modular housing units made from mass timber — \$5 million. It also will assess economic and environmental effects, and the efficiency of creating these housing units to deal with the housing crisis.

- Among the smaller items are \$19 million, already in the state budget, for the Oregon Health Authority to increase reimbursement rates that it cut for dental care under the Oregon Health Plan; \$10 million for the Oregon Tourism Commission to give outfitters whose business suffered during the pandemic-induced downturn; and \$2 million for a program for gun violence prevention in east Multnomah County.

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