

ANIMAL: Only eight dogs a month get licensed with the city

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rate, but the community also bears responsibility for letting pets run wild without getting them spayed or neutered.

“Is it really Pet Rescue’s fault that that’s happening?” he asked.

Mayor David Drotzmann said in many cases people can’t afford the procedure. He suggested it was worth looking into ways to work with local veterinarians or an out-of-town program to help people who can’t afford to get their pets fixed. Councilwoman Clara Beas Fitzgerald suggested more community education on the subject as well.

Smith said he met with Stanfield and Umatilla last week to discuss paying for a humane officer dedicated to bringing the area’s stray animals off the streets. That would come with a price, although Kirwan pointed out the city could probably make more money if it actually enforced its dog licensing policy.

Smith said an average of only eight dogs a month get licensed with the city. Police Chief Jason Edmiston said as far as he’s aware the department has never issued a ticket for an unlicensed dog.

As for the contract with Pet Rescue, Smith said city investigation showed the shelter is fulfilling the terms of its contract. However, he also heard from a number of citizens who refuse to use Pet Rescue anymore. He said PAWS animal shelter in Pendleton takes about 200 animals a year from Hermiston residents.

He said while Pet Rescue is a private entity that the city doesn’t control, he thought it was worthwhile to have conversations encouraging the shelter to find ways to adopt out more animals and better utilize volunteers.

Stanfield resident Jennifer Berry said she would happy to organize fundraisers and volunteers to build a dog run and make other needed improvements. She said Pet Rescue isn’t perfect, but is dealing with a high

volume of dogs and cats. While she was volunteering there one afternoon she saw four dogs go to new homes and five dogs brought in.

“Whatever the community can do is fantastic ... (the director) just doesn’t have the manpower to get it done,” she said.

Some residents were less charitable. RaeLynn Moon said the city ought to be ashamed of the shelter and the lack of compassion she saw there. She said she brought in a dog that had been hit by a car and was given no help and was called crazy.

“I was not only treated poorly but given no resource,” she said.

Pet Rescue manager Beau Putnam countered that Moon “got directly in my face” and started calling him names after he said he was happy to take the dog as long as she paid the \$25 pound fee for animals brought in from outside city limits.

“I can only take so much slander and lies,” he said,

asking the city to not drag out its discussion of Pet Rescue.

Drotzmann said he was aware of how difficult it was for Putnam to be the subject of so much public criticism but as a public body the city had to listen to all sides and consider them seriously.

“We don’t want to make a rash decision,” he said.

Councilman Doug Smith said when he was a Hermiston police officer he remembered one of the many times Putnam showed up to take a dog after his on-call hours. In this case Putnam showed up within 10 minutes in the middle of the night for a dog hit by a car and the dog bit him hard. Smith said Putnam showed restraint with the dog, understanding that it was lashing out because it was hurt.

“Sometimes when people are passionate they lash out just like an animal does,” Smith said.

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CLIMATE: Statistics show wildfire season is becoming longer on average

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County Climate Change Focus Group, with members specializing in a diverse set of experience and expertise.

Jeff Blackwood, a former supervisor on the Umatilla National Forest who retired after 35 years with the U.S. Forest Service, moderated the panel discussion. He said their goal was to take a worldwide issue and boil it down to the local level.

Scientists from NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported 2014 was the hottest year on Earth since record-keeping began in 1880 and global warming of the past 50 years is due primarily to the burning of fossil fuels.

Mary Wister, science and operations officer at the National Weather Service in Pendleton, explained how greenhouse gases work to trap heat and energy in the atmosphere. She also delved into the planet’s own natural functions that influence the climate, such as ocean temperatures that drive El Nino and La Nina weather patterns.

The trend shows tem-

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— David Powell, retired silviculturist on the Umatilla National Forest.

peratures in Washington and Oregon have increased since 1950, along with decreasing precipitation, consistent with El Nino’s effect on the Pacific Northwest.

Sea surface temperatures also chart what is known as Pacific Decadel Oscillation, characterized by longer-term “warm” and “cool” phases. When a dry phase matches up with El Nino — as it appears to be doing now — the potential for more extreme weather increases, such as drought that saps water supply and feeds more intense wildfires.

Wildfire season is becoming longer on average, statistics show. Climate Desk, a collaborative group that explores the impacts of climate change, said fire-

fighters across the West are spending an average of 92 more days per year fighting large fires than they did in 1973.

The key is to thin densely overgrown tree stands to make them more resilient to these fires, said David Powell, a recently retired silviculturist on the Umatilla National Forest.

“These drought conditions are going to cause some of these disturbance processes to change, pushing these forests into places they’ve never been before,” Powell said. “I think we have a lot more work to do.”

The situation is a little different for agriculture, since farmers can more easily adjust their operations to remain profitable. Chad Kruger, director of

the Washington State University Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources, said some crops —including winter wheat — can increase yield along with the increase in carbon dioxide.

It all comes back to water, Kruger said. If dryland farmers can get the rainfall, and irrigators the supply they need from reservoirs and streams, they will continue to be fine. But Kruger said climate change only creates more uncertainty. And where there are already issues with water, the problems could intensify.

“If you don’t have water, all of a sudden you have fairly severe effects,” he said.

The effect climate change has on water and hydro systems will be addressed during the next Eastern Oregon Forum on March 10. Panelists will also touch on impacts to fish, wildlife and public health.

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PORT: City plans to create buffer between land, golf course

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ments made back and forth. But with the financial consideration, reputation of the two entities and public benefit all taken into consideration, Puzey said they were able to come to a cordial agreement.

“This agreement should be an indicator that all parties would like the past to be the past,” Puzey said.

It is possible the port could still build the warehouse at another location, Puzey said. The city, meanwhile, intends to create a buffer between the land and golf course to address future development.

Ward said the city planning commission is already tackling zoning regulations for recreational marijuana and adult businesses in Umatilla, and it could take some time before they revisit the Bud Draper corridor. Until then, landowners won’t have to worry about anything happening on the property, commercial or otherwise.

“This is an opportunity for everybody to sit down and look at what that property will do for us in the future,”

Ward said. “Now that it’s the city’s, we have a whole new broad set of procedures and it is a completely public process from here on.”

Ron Hosek, who owns the Big River Golf Course, said he’s always understood the property to be for residential use. He looks forward to establishing what he described as a nice area, with large trees and homes along the strip.

“There still has to be some public input on this,” Hosek said. “I hope the voice of reason will be there.”

Joe Franell, of Eastern Oregon Telecom, served as mediator during negotiations and said the agreement is tangible evidence of a restored relationship between the city and port.

“The elected officials and managers on both sides of this disagreement should be commended for their determination to find a productive resolution to the situation,” Franell said in a statement. ““Their strong leadership has resulted in not just a healthy relationship between the parties, but also in real hope for the future of economic development in the area.”

SCHOOL: Freewater Principal said two-thirds of faculty is against move

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member McKenzie Marly consulted with the Tillamook School District about their consolidation effort several years ago.

Marly reported back that the Tillamook administration had seen positive results since their reconfiguration, citing the district’s 80 percent English learners graduation rate as a key statistic.

Comparatively, Milton-Freewater’s English learners graduation rate is 69 percent.

The potential consolidation isn’t supported by everyone.

Freewater Principal Aaron Duff said two-thirds of his faculty is against the move, with the prevailing feeling being that a reconfiguration could damage Freewater’s academic progress.

Board Vice-Chairman Tim McElrath also voiced his opposition, saying that his daughter was only able to shed the stigma of having ADHD after entering middle school and making new

friends from different elementary schools. McElrath said that other students with similar stigmas could also suffer.

Regardless of their opinion, both administrators and board members agreed that any sort of reconfiguration had to be done right.

If the district chooses reconfiguration, it will have to overcome a number of logistical hurdles like staggered elementary schedules.

Transportation Director Bryan Miller said the biggest challenge wouldn’t be finding more buses or implementing new routes, but finding two new bus drivers to accommodate the new schedules.

Board member Tara Lewis suggested the district bring aboard former interim superintendent Jim Reger as an independent consultant for the consolidation, which spurred the agreement of Clark.

No action was taken on a potential reconfiguration and neither administration nor board mentioned when the consolidation would take place.

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