

Police Chief Fish on track to start in May

By Kathleen Ellyn
Wallowa County Chieftain

Enterprise City Council made short work of a long agenda on April 11, dealing with news good, bad and mixed.

- It was sad news when councilors heard that police officer TJ Miller had resigned, bringing the number of police officers on duty in Enterprise down to two: George Kohlhepp and Jed Stone.
- But good news followed when Young reported that Police Chief Candidate Joel Fish so far has passed all of his back-

ground checks and is on target to take over the force by May 23.

- More mixed news followed when the council learned that the library lift project suffered two hits to the contingency fund. The first hit came when oil contamination was found in the soil and treatment costs had to be taken out of the fund. Then the council learned that a “panic room” was required for disabled folks who may not be able to exit the building via the lift in an emergency. City Administrator Michelle Young said city staff would write for a Brownfields

Grant and look into other ways to cover the soil treatment costs and replenish funds.

- “I think we stand a pretty good chance of getting the (Brownfield’s) grant,” Young said.
- The Landmarks Committee got good news, having received a grant of over \$7,700 that will help conduct an intensive level survey of the Cemetery property, help owners of the old Chieftain building to do a preservation plan for the restoration of the Bowlby stone, create a community project recognizing façade improvements downtown, help

pay to send commissioners to the State Historic Preservation Conference and have a few dollars left over for staff costs.

- The Motel Tax Committee divided up the available \$13,000 and announced the winners of the grants to support tourism producing events within city limits: \$2,000 each went to Mountain High Broncos and Bulls, Bowlby Bash, Mule Days, Juniper Jam, the Courthouse Concert Series and Greater Enterprise Main Street (GEMS). Wallowa Land Trust and AlpenFest each received \$500.

- In the wake of an increase to landfill tipping fees, the council unanimously voted to allow Rahn Sanitary to raise its rates by no more than 20 percent overall in two installations. The first 10 percent raise in fees will be seen on bills for May, and then a representative of the company will return to the council for approval of the second installment by June. Co-owner Mike Rahn said the second installment may not come to 10 percent, but that the exact amount was still not known.

“We figure 20 percent will cover us, but it just takes time to

figure this out,” Rahn said.

The City of Joseph has already approved the 20 percent increase in their jurisdiction.

- David Hayslip of Enterprise was approved for a three-year term on the Planning Commission, replacing Rob Taylor, who has already departed for his new job with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service working with endangered birds on Midway Island.
- The Planning Commission is putting together an advisory committee for upcoming discussions on updates to local land-use codes.

Ministry leader outlines transitional housing plan

By Kathleen Ellyn
Wallowa County Chieftain

In the last year the number of parolees in Wallowa County has exploded from 40 to over 100. Now, there are over 100 parolees in Wallowa County who are receiving minimal oversight and little assistance to turn their lives around.

Without a place to go or a job to go to, many of these individuals are couch surfing with friends — often those with whom they got into trouble in the first place and making little progress at turning their lives around.

Those are the facts as reported by law enforcement of Wallowa County.

Neal Isley, president of Point of Connection Ministry, wants to do something about that. His proposal and that of his board of directors is that the former Youth Center building he owns on Highway 82 between Joseph and Enterprise serve as transitional housing for four non-violent offenders who are willing to sign on to his Transformational program and get their lives together.

“At the end of the day this is a community problem,” Isley said. “This is a real and growing problem and we can address it here or we can address it somewhere else but if we don’t address it we’re going to pay for it. Those guys who are not in our program are mostly unsupervised.”

Approximately 50 individuals gathered at Community Connections in Enterprise on Monday night to hear about Isley’s Transformational Housing plans. Isley does not yet have a conditional-use permit to create the housing program in an R-1 (rural residential) zone, and Wallowa County Planning most likely will make a decision on his request for such a permit by the end of May.

Most of the individuals who attended the meeting were in favor of transitional housing for parolees, but some of the potential facility’s neighbors had serious concerns, from declining property values to personal safety.

Some misunderstanding of the program was immediately made apparent; with individuals worrying that serious offenders would be “shipped in,” and that Isley was not qual-

ified to handle the personal, addiction or mental health issues parolees might exhibit.

Isley made clear that no violent offenders, sex offenders or parolees from outside the county were being considered. Furthermore, no addiction or mental health issues would be handled on site. If such problems were uncovered, the parolee would be referred to the appropriate professional program for treatment, he said.

The program would focus on life skills and coping mechanisms in addition to providing a safe place away from situations or individuals that served as triggers for bad behavior. Parolees would be required to take urine tests three times a week, pledge to work toward positive changes, and assist in upkeep of the grounds in addition to meeting any court mandated work or counseling programs.

It was difficult for anyone to find fault with the program as presented, but the issues of zoning, property values and safety persisted for nearly 90 minutes of sometimes heated conversation with concerned neighbors asking for guarantees that no crimes would be committed against them, documents pledging that Isley would personally make up any difference in property values should they decline, suggestions that Isley’s ministry was just a “way to circumvent zoning law” and accusations of arrogance in Isley’s stated intent to continue the ministry to parolees “if not

at this location, at another.”

Many individuals in the group expressed support of the program and told personal stories of how relatives or they, themselves, had been helped by transitional housing.

Mental health counselor and crisis coordinator Paul Spriggs-Flanders of Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness spoke briefly in support of a transitional housing program.

Other individuals in the social services field also spoke in support but asked to be considered private individuals and not representatives of their places of employment.

Parole officers who had intended to come to the meeting and help field questions were not permitted to come after County Commissioner Susan Roberts determined it was not the place of any county employee to become involved in what was still a land-use issue.

Nevertheless, Roberts did make an appearance in the last minutes of the meeting to explain to the gathering that transitional housing would be created in the county one way or another.

“Two years ago, in an effort to suspend expansion of prisons, the State Justice Reinvestment Program was put into effect and the county was given \$100,000 per biennium to develop and track a program to handle probation issues,” Roberts said. “One of the things that helps parolees return to useful life is transitional housing.”

She also confirmed Isley’s claim that more than 100 parolees were already in the county — many having never served any time in jail, but having been paroled directly out of court.



Isley

NEW CLINIC IN ENTERPRISE



Scot Heisel/Wallowa County Chieftain

A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held Friday morning for the grand opening of Affordable Integrated Medicine at 610 W. North St. in Enterprise. Dr. Billie Kaska-Suto (pictured above, holding scissors) owns and operates the new medical clinic. Look for our annual Medical Guide in May for a full article about the new clinic. Pictured from left: Dr. Kaska-Suto’s parents Bill and Shirley Kaska, her son Blade Suto, staff member Wrenn Brown, Dr. Kaska-Suto and staff member Tiffany De Lyria.

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