

BUDGET

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The heat turned up as councilor Pearl Sturm was asking a question on the subject and was interrupted by Sajonia and Evans. Clevenger told Evans not to talk over Sturm.

“Is that how this is going to go?” Evans asked.

“That’s how it’s going to go,” Clevenger replied. “Be polite.”

The meeting increased in acrimony, particularly between Clevenger and Evans, returning repeatedly to the library funding question and whether the committee had time to go through the budget line by line to look for ways to fund street repair.

At one point, Sajonia stepped in and said that she feared that because no one wanted to discuss changes, the council was virtually a rubber stamp for the proposed draft by Warnock.

She said that during her council tenure, the committee had always reviewed the budget thoroughly and made tough decisions.

“I’m getting the impression tonight that we’re not going to make hard decisions. We’re just going to pass the budget, just as is,” she said.

She added that although the city was short on funds, the committee could find a

way forward without cutting into personnel costs.

Warnock said she agreed and that the council could look at services and materials as a way to save money. Eventually Sajonia and Warnock got into a conversation with each trying to talk over the other. Clevenger stepped in, addressing Sajonia.

“OK, enough, you got your point. Make your point, and let someone else talk.”

“You know, Tom, I’m out of here,” Sajonia fired back.

“You don’t need us,” Evans added, before the two stormed from the meeting, slamming the door, less than 45 minutes into the session.

Warnock suggested a 10-minute break. The remaining council members surmised that Sajonia and Evans had staged the set to even though committee rules state that members shouldn’t discuss the budget with each other outside the committee. Both Sajonia and Evans later denied they had acted inappropriately.

Councilors George Ballard and Rodd Clark were absent. The remaining committee members discussed the budget for more than two hours following the disruption. The only significant action taken was to propose moving \$1,500 from the city hall miscellaneous repair and maintenance to the community center for maintenance.

Joseph council debates hiring policies

City experiences difficulty getting applicants for open positions

By Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

A day after an acrimonious budget meeting, Joseph City Council was at loggerheads again during a special session to discuss the city’s vacant positions.

Under consideration are an assistant for city clerk Donna Warnock, a possible additional temporary public works person and a Main Street maintenance person.

The meeting began amicably enough with Warnock noting that she had several applicants for the assistant position as well as two applications for the Main Street maintenance position. Council member Teresa Sajonia said that one of the applicants did not return phone calls and the other may not be interested in all of the duties.

Mayor Dennis Sands noted that the job does not provide insurance, a stumbling block for some applicants.

The council also discussed having businesses owners take care of the flower boxes located in front of nearby their businesses to make one position easier to fill.

With interviews for some of the positions slated for the following week, Tom Clevenger,

a member of the city’s hiring committee, along with council members George Ballard and Tyler Evans, mentioned he had taken the week off. Sands offered to fill in for Clevenger, but Evans suggested that the council interview applicants because of difficulties getting the hiring committee together for interviewing purposes.

Council member Rodd Clark said he agreed and suggested the city try a formal hiring process, citing an incident in which the city fired a temporary employee and it didn’t go well.

Clevenger challenged Clark’s idea and suggested each department do its own interviews.

The pot started to boil when Clark said he had received a number of complaints from the citizens that Warnock essentially ran the city as a one-woman show and that mayor Dennis Sands and the council functioned as her puppets.

He said he believed the complaints unfounded, but if the council followed the suggestions of him and Evans, it would free Warnock and public works supervisor Jim Davis to pursue their official duties. The changes would eliminate alleged accusations of hiring

favoritism on the city’s part and the possibility of lawsuits, he said.

A debate ensued between Clevenger and Clarke on the relative merits of their arguments while Sands suggested that the council hire department heads and the department heads hire their own employees.

Council member Teresa Sajonia said the council had hired city employees in the past. She suggested the council provided more individual perspective and helped weed out undesirable candidates, particularly in terms of employee background.

No one disputed Sajonia’s ideas, and Sands asked Warnock to call the city’s job applicants and set up interviews.

“Have someone else do it — if they’d like. If anyone’s available, I’ll get the applications ready for them,” Warnock replied. An uncomfortable silence followed.

After Evans attempted to change the subject, Sajonia addressed Warnock and said she understood the meeting had gotten personal.

“I was just accused that I’m totally in charge and that Dennis (Sands) is my puppet. How am I supposed to take that?” Warnock asked.

Clark reiterated that the things he repeated were concerns expressed by citizens, not his personal opinions. He

also said he was not at liberty to divulge the names of those who made the complaints.

Because an executive session was scheduled, the meeting was adjourned, which also provided an opportunity for the pot to boil over. Audience member Kathy Bingham said that Evans and Sajonia owed the budget committee an apology for walking out of its meeting the previous night.

“I’ve never seen such unprofessional attitudes in my life ... I was insulted and demeaned ... Shame on you.”

She started to leave, but Sajonia responded that she left because Tom Clevenger had pointed at her as well as raising his voice and showing anger. She added she was sorry that Bingham was insulted by the action. Sajonia also admitted she had been guilty of such actions in the past.

“Yes you have,” Clevenger interrupted. “Yes you have.”

Sajonia told Clevenger she didn’t approve of his behavior at the meeting.

“You were out-and-out mean and nasty. You can roll your eyes, say what you want.”

After more words about her treatment at the earlier meeting, Sajonia again apologized to Bingham and the other council members, which Bingham accepted as she left, just as the council went into executive session.

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Business Foundations class begins July 10

The Business Foundations Class that has assisted numerous Wallowa County residents in preparing them to run their own businesses is coming back. The free seven-week workshop series helps entrepreneurs and small-business owners build the basis for a successful enterprise.

This hands-on class covers the basics of running a successful business:

- Overhead and inventory costs
- Goal-setting and sales projections
- Marketing, taxes and licensing
- Other considerations to bring it all together in a business plan

This class is also a requirement for individuals who wish to establish a Federal Individual Development Account to raise money for business reasons. More information on IDA is also available from NEOEDD.

Register by June 23 to reserve a seat. Class will run 6-9 p.m. July 10 to Aug. 14 at Wallowa City Hall, 104 N Pine St.

Instructor Lisa Dawson of Northeast Oregon Economic Development District is also adding a class to guide entrepreneurs in hiring employees.

To register, call NEOEDD by June 23 at 541-426-3598 or email: kristyathens@neoedd.org.

The classes will also be offered in Elgin, Baker City and LaGrande.

The Northeast Oregon Economic Development District’s mission is to provide resources and facilitate quality decision-making for the benefit of entrepreneurs, businesses and communities in Baker, Union, and Wallowa counties.



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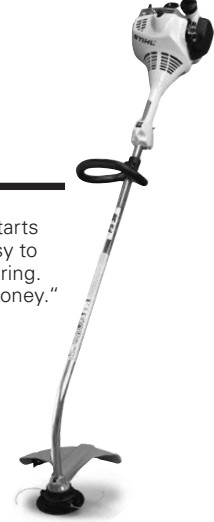
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