

Sheriff's contract dominates Joseph meeting

Steve Tool

Wallowa County Chieftain

The city of Joseph's contract with the Wallowa County Sheriff's Office proved a sticking point at the city's meeting on Thursday, July 11. At the meeting, WCSO was supposed to report on hours worked and duties performed. Although a report was sent, no one from the office attended the meeting. WCSO contracts with Joseph to provide extra law enforcement protection for nearly \$114,000 per year at approximately 240 hours per month.

According to Mayor Teresa Sajonia, the contract stipulates that a WCSO representative give the report in person, and she asked a note be made to that effect.

During the "Mayor's Items" section of the agenda at about 1:18 into the meeting, Mayor Sajonia said that she'd felt great frustration regarding ordinance enforcement within the city. Because the mayor cannot give personal directives to the city staff, Sajonia threat-

THE SHERIFF'S CONTRACT

The City of Joseph sent a copy of its contract with the Wallowa County Sheriff's Office. According to the contract, the sheriff is not required to send a representative, only a report: Per No. 2 under the Requirement of County section: "The sheriff shall also provide a written monthly summary to the City of all law enforcement activities within the city limits for that month."

The section regarding ordinance enforcement appears somewhat vague: "The parties hereby agree that violations of State Statutes and City Ordinances shall be referred to the Wallowa County District Attorney for review for the filing of criminal or other charges in Wallowa County Circuit Court of the State of Oregon ... County agrees that District Attorney for Wallowa County may prosecute as required by State Statute al (sic) violations cited by the Sheriff or his deputies in the City of Joseph ..."

- By Steve Tool

ened to make complaints to city hall staff as a private citizen.

"We had a hard time passing this last contract with our sheriff's office," she said. "The way it got passed was that they would do ordinance enforcement."

"That's right," council member Marty Hamilton added.

Sajonia went on to say

that three of the votes on the council were dependent on the sheriff's office performing ordinance enforcement. She pointed to frustrations with some businesses that obey ordinances while others don't because they think ordinances lack "bite."

She also said that as mayor, she could tell the department that they were not following the contract.

The mayor also reiterated money the city pays WCSO.

"I want everyone to know that's where my head is right now," Sajonia said. "I find it to be a lot of money for the whole thing (contract) not being followed."

Hamilton asked if any ordinance enforcement was included in the monthly report. "Not that I've seen — no," the mayor said.

Sajonia's domestic partner, Raider Heck, also spoke up. He said that the city spends \$9,000 a month to have ordinances enforced just as the city was coming up on the peak tourist season. He noted that WCSO was supposed to patrol 60 hours per week.

"Sixty hours — not six calls, not 13 calls, 60 hours," he said.

Sajonia said she felt an obligation to Joseph citizens to make sure their money didn't get wasted. She added she wished the sheriff had attended the meeting so the issues could be brought up in his presence.

City recorder Belinda Buswell said that she had

concerns because she had personally seen city staff approach different addresses regarding ordinance enforcement while deputies in the vicinity actually stayed back and did not lead the way.

"Which puts people in precarious situations, possibly an unsafe environment," she said. "I feel that needs to go in the record. That should not be tolerated."

Sajonia ordered Buswell's request in the record and stated that she was like a rabid dog because she wanted ordinances enforced because she pushed for the contract and expected that ordinance enforcement was a part of the contract, and there wouldn't be excuses. She said the city had a designated deputy (Violetta) but things were back to being the same as they were three years previously.

City administrator, Larry Braden, said that the \$9,000 monthly check was a large amount of money for the city.

Sajonia said the city would keep citizens informed about the issue

while Heck suggested that citizens go to city hall and ask for a copy of the contract.

"So that you understand honestly what the county is being contracted to provide, and being paid if it's provided or not," he said.

After more discussion, Sajonia closed the subject, saying, "I don't want to make it a big deal, but it is a big deal."

In other council news, the city approved nine resolutions ranging from adoption of its yearly budget to increasing city utility fees. The council unanimously passed resolution 2019-09, which stipulated a 10.12 percent increase in basic water fees from \$29.60 to \$32.60 per month. Resolution 2019-10 increased base sewer rates 10.32 percent from \$28.10 to \$31 per month. The council ratified an additional \$4 per month for the city's Street Project Fee, from \$6 to \$10 per month.

None of the proposed fee increases met with any pushback from citizens and all passed unanimously.

Ditch-cleaning bill passes, but governor has yet to sign it

Mateusz Perkowski
Capital Press

A proposal to streamline ditch-cleaning regulations got in just under the wire to win approval from Oregon lawmakers, though farmers will likely wait another year to use the program.

Growers would be allowed to remove up to 3,000 cubic yards of dirt per mile of ditch over five years without a state fill-removal permit under House Bill 2437, up from 50 cubic yards per year under existing law.

The bill's fate was uncertain as Republican senators walked out to prevent a vote on a controversial climate bill toward the end of the legislative session.

However, they returned in time for the Senate to vote 18-9 in favor of HB 2437 on June 29, the day before the Legislature adjourned for the year. The bill had already passed the House 42-17 about two weeks earlier.

The bill continues to face opposition from some environmental groups, which would welcome a veto from Gov. Kate Brown. The governor has until Aug. 9 to decide to sign the bill.

"From our point of view, this bill takes things back



Farmer John Scharf explains the drainage of tile lines from his fields near Amity, Ore., into a ditch. A compromise bill passed by the Legislature would allow farmers to clean out ditches more easily.

decades as far as wetland protection," said Kimberley Priestley, senior policy analyst for the Waterwatch of Oregon nonprofit.

Farmers who clean ditches under the program would first have to notify the Oregon Department of Agriculture of their plans, which

would be reviewed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Work could only take place during the dry season and the streamlined rules would not apply to essential salmonid habitat.

Opponents of the bill worry about the unintended

consequences of removing a much larger quantity of sediment from ditches, as well as the effect of depositing the material in wetlands, said Priestley.

They're also troubled by the lack of public notice for proposed ditch-cleaning, she said. "I think there are citi-

zens across the state that are interested in these types of projects."

If the bill is signed into

law, it doesn't go into effect until January 2020. Implementing the new rules will also require a memorandum of understanding between ODA and the Oregon Department of State Lands, which oversees fill-removal permits.

The two agencies will decide whether additional rule-making is necessary to implement the bill and there is no timeline for when the new regulations will become operational, said Meliah Masiba, legislative coordinator for DSL.

The bill's language is comprehensive enough that rule-making may not be necessary, said Mary Anne Cooper, vice president of public policy for the Oregon Farm Bureau. Even so, it's likely that farmers will have to wait until next spring to provide notices and the following summer or autumn to clean ditches under the program, Cooper said.

The Farm Bureau will be keeping an eye on the program's progress as it's implemented, she said. "Our number one priority is ease of use for farmers."

Paving on Highway 82 between Enterprise and Joseph begins July 29 to upgrade road surface

ENTERPRISE — Starting July 29 we will be upgrading the deteriorating pavement along the Wallowa Lake Highway, OR 82, between Enterprise and Joseph. The work includes a week and a half of asphalt resurfacing followed by a chip seal that will be applied two weeks later. The chip

seal will take about two or three days and help extend the life of the road surface. No work will be performed during Chief Joseph Day's event.

You should expect delays of up to 20 minutes, traffic controlled by flaggers and pilot cars, loose rock on the roadway, reduced

speeds, and day and night time brooming operations. Local residents with driveways connecting to OR 82 may also experience temporary impacts as the operation moves past their property. Please slow down and plan extra travel time along this route. We greatly appreciate your patience as crews

repair and resurface pavement, and perform other work to help keep highways safe and efficient.

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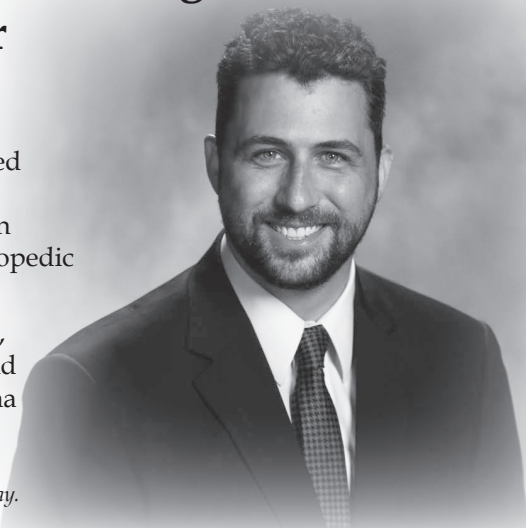
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