

# Cloud: "I don't think this should be brushed under the rug"

Continued from Page A1

In the letter, the chamber tried to be supportive of the council, but repeatedly called for action citing the "dys-function" of city government.

In response to Lockhart and the chamber's letter, Mayor Belinda Buswell said steps will be taken.

"I believe that we are going to address that and we'll inform the public as soon as we have a meeting scheduled to address those things," she said. "We'll work with Wyatt and with Brock and we'll get these things taken care of. Thank you for your patience. There's been a little upheaval recently. We haven't forgotten."

## Thin skin?

Toward the end of the meeting, individual councilors had the opportunity to cite their concerns.

"I'll start with (Braden's) resignation letter, where it says 'constant harassment from members' and at times I read that, I wonder if that means me. I don't think so, but it seems rather open-ended," Councilman Matt Soots said. "I've come to the conclusion that unless (Braden) basically points a finger, it remains just speculation and I don't know if any action would ever be taken in legal means. I do know, as a fact, that there's been this kind of situation going



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

**A cloud remains over Joseph City Hall on Friday, May 7, 2021, after the City Council received a scathing rebuke from the Joseph Chamber of Commerce over the council's dysfunctional performance and another employee complaint of harassment surfaced at its meeting the previous evening.**

on within the city between employees I've contacted over a year ago. I didn't think it was so widespread. But it seems there are people who need to leave their quarrels at home and, as the letter points out from the chamber, just get your job done. I'm not sure I've ever run across stuff like this happening on such a continuous basis. I feel I'm still a fairly new resident — I've been here since 2017 — but I've had family in the area for decades. I've listened and talked to a lot of people."

Soots told of one person he'd talked to before he lived

here who said, "You're lucky to not be working for (the council)."

He wondered, too, about the sensitivity of those feeling harassed.

"I'm afraid I've come to the conclusion that, and Mr. Eckstein brought this up at the first of the meeting and it kind of surprised me, about being thick-skinned," Soots said. "Knowing some of the things that I think other people don't know about this situation that I've seen in writing and in emails and so on, I think some people may have been a little bit thin-skinned and all this stuff coming

together has brought about this problem, not just one thing. I'm just hoping, perhaps, this is a turning point."

Councilwoman Lisa Collier appreciated Soots' comments, but disagreed.

"I don't think this is about thin skin. I don't think this should be brushed under the rug. We do need to move forward, but I think we have a real issue that I would like to have an executive session over. I don't think this is about thin skin. I was contacted by an employee who has been off for quite some time. He called me yesterday and asked if I would give an

update for him."

## Another harassment claim

Collier gave an updated on behalf of City Parks and Main Street Supervisor Dennis Welch, who has been off on leave and faces a tough decision on his plans to return to work. According to Collier, Welch has until May 14 to declare whether he plans to return to work or not. He has been diagnosed with severe stress stemming directly from his employment, Collier said. Welch has been diagnosed as a victim of gaslighting, a form of abuse that causes someone to doubt their sanity or perceptions, belittling and harassment.

"He reports being heartbroken," Collier said. "This is not a matter of being thin-skinned. We as a council need to do something. We're losing good people."

Soots agreed with Collier and she asked Eckstein to reach out to Welch.

At this, Buswell said the council needs additional legal advice.

"(City Attorney) Wyatt (Baum) had discussed having an executive session at some point, so I think Brock should touch base (with Baum)," she said. "It will be addressed, but we have to follow the attorney to see what executive session we want to have."

Eckstein said he hopes to

be able to effectively help with relations between the council and employees.

"I am the shield between you guys and the employees and between the employees and you guys," he said. "All information should come through me and should get disbursed to the employees and if the employees have an issue, it should be brought to my attention disbursed to you folks."

Eckstein, who works with his wife's La Grande-based law firm, Laura Eckstein Law, also said he could help with minor legal advice.

"What I would recommend is maintaining Baum and Smith as your attorney of record just in case you get into any sort of major trial," he said.

He also agreed to help with the budget the city must have completed by June 30, along with Deyette Perry CPA, who also was present at the meeting. City officials noted that Braden had completed part of the budget before his resignation, so it's not like they're starting from scratch. However, he said, the budget process usually starts in February, so the city's a bit behind. He said the council likely will have to call special meetings to allow for the public comment required by law prior to final council approval. The council voted to appoint Eckstein as its budget officer.

## Hospital:

Continued from Page A1

list, which was released earlier this year."

## Constantly seeking to improve

Davy said there consistently are meetings within hospital leadership and councils that assess the hospital's inner workings and where it can continue to improve, even with such a high ranking.

"We internally have identified scores of things we want to get better at. We in no way feel like we have arrived," he said.

He said part of the reason perfection is the ultimate — even if unattainable because of human fallibility — goal is because it "feels unethical" to make the goal anything less. "You cannot set a goal that 95% of the time we'll get our care right," he said. "There's not a guilt trip that you don't get perfection. We celebrate success, but how can we edge closer to perfection?"

Pace said the hospital being among the top in the country lets residents know they are in good hands.



Wallowa County Chieftain, File

**Wallowa Memorial Hospital has been named a Top-100 Critical Access Hospital for the eighth time in 11 years, and a Top-20 CAH for the fourth time in five years.**

"With all the metrics that they use, this really assures them they are receiving the best possible care in our rural community that is equal to the care they would receive in larger metro areas," she said. "Because part of the metrics they look at is cost, charge and financial efficiency, they are not only receiving a high quality of care but at a (low cost). "They have access to this level of care in our remote corner of the world."

Last year, the hospital received a percentile rating of 99.7 based on a set of data from different sources, including the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, and Quality Director

Stacey Karvoski said that score was based on data from 2016 to 2019. A more recent score has not been made available.

"They look at all the data and compile it into a percentile rating," she said.

Davy added that it's not only about the care the hospital gives, but how the hospital can better help the community, including in focusing resources for preventative care and in what are deemed the top community needs by the community.

## Local assessment a key piece of data

The data the hospital uses to inform it includes a

Community Health Needs Assessment done every three years within the community, as well as federal data.

"We are often amazed at the high levels of tobacco, diabetes, lifestyle-related illnesses, (and) by seeing the latest data, it helps us focus our resources. What do we need to focus on the next three years?" Davy said. "We want to get really good at helping you prevent that from happening."

As for what the distinction means within hospital walls, Pace said the staff is proud of what it has continued to accomplish.

"I think the word that really comes to mind is pride, in not only ourselves, but our team that we continue to deliver the type of care that delivers the best outcomes for our community," she said.

The CEO added that the community does play a role in the success of WMH, and should be lauded for it, as well.

"It's not just about the hospital, it's about the community. They have been supportive," he said. "This is about 7,000 people working together. They need to share the credit for it."

## Council:

Continued from Page A1

Councilwoman Kathy Bingham, who voted against the change, asked why it was considered. Councilwoman Lisa Collier, who serves on the committee, said committee members agreed red went better with the Western motif downtown. Collier said that the state Department of Transportation says

that although yellow is more common, red is an acceptable alternative.

In another matter, Buswell told the council word should be coming soon on the \$229,109 the city is to receive under the American Rescue Plan Act signed by President Joe Biden on March 11.

"We're still a few weeks out before the feds give us the operating parameters and disburse the money, so ... hopefully by Friday (May 14),

we'll have some regulations from the feds and discuss the monies disbursement, which I'm sure Brock will be handling," Buswell said.

The council also approved a liquor license for the Kokanee Inn.

Co-owner Michelle Britt said when she and co-owner Eric Makela opened the inn two years ago, they didn't want a liquor license because the focus of the inn is primarily families. However, now they're ready for a change,

including a happy hour.

"We thought we'd give it a try," she said.

But they still want to keep the serving of liquor limited.

"We don't want to be a party destination," she said. "We don't want to be called that."

This week at

# Josephy Center

FOR ARTS AND CULTURE

**Fire Stories exhibit**  
April 23 - June 14

**Whittle a Honey Drizzler class**  
May 15 from 10am-2 p.m.; must pre-register

**Brown Bag- The Granite Gulch Fire w/Jason Lyman & Adam Wing**  
May 18 at Noon

**Paint Along in Pastels: Zoom class**  
May 19 from 4-8:30 p.m.; must pre-register

**Discussion Panel with Stephen Pyne**  
May 20 from 2-4 p.m.

josephy.org  
541.432.0505

WALLOWA COUNTY HUMANE SOCIETY

# Pet of the Week

**ADULT CATS AVAILABLE NOW!**

Your choice of 6 fuzzy felines

Brought to you by,

**Available for Adoption \$45 adoption fee**  
<http://www.wallowacountyhumanesociety.org/>

Enterprise Animal Hospital, Inc.

**Do your part to stop COVID-19!**

**GET VACCINATED. Protect yourself, your family, and our community.**

**Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccines available Monday - Saturday.**

Call 541-426-4502 to schedule your vaccination.

A Non-Profit Community Health Center

**True Value BARGAINS OF THE MONTH**  
While supplies last.

**FINAL PRICE 18.99**  
22.99 SALE PRICE  
-4.00 MAIL-IN REBATE\*

**Roundup® 36.8 oz. Qeed/Grass Killer Concentrate Plus**

Fast-acting formula kills weeds and grasses to the root. For use in a tank sprayer.  
L 147 895 B12

\*Limit 2 per offer. Consumer responsible for taxes.

**M-F 8AM-5:30PM • SAT 8AM-5PM • SUN 9AM-3PM**

Hurricane Creek Road  
Enterprise, Oregon  
541-426-3116

**WALLOWA COUNTY GRAIN GROWERS**

**BEHIND EVERY PROJECT IS A True Value**  
Sale Ends 5/31/21