

Buswell resigns as Joseph mayor; Collier steps in

Outgoing mayor moved to Elgin

By RONALD BOND and BILL BRADSHAW
Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — Joseph has a new mayor.

The City Council — in a virtual meeting held Thursday, Sept. 2 — was read a letter from former Mayor Belinda Buswell that was effective the previous day resigning her position. She said in the letter that she had moved outside the city limits of Joseph. Section 27 of the Joseph City Charter, she wrote, notes actions that can create a vacancy in the mayoral position automatically, and one of them is “removal of residency from the city.”

Buswell told the Chieftain Thursday, Sept. 2, that she has moved to Elgin, and “that was because I am forwarding my life relationship I have with my boyfriend.”

Buswell took over as mayor in January after defeating then-Mayor Teresa Sajonia in the November 2020 election.

“I didn’t want to give up being mayor. We had so much left to do, we’ve come so far, (and it’s) been awesome to watch the council find their voice,” she said. “I think I’m leaving the city in good hands.”

She held the seat for just eight months, and also oversaw the city during a time of turmoil within the city government, including the resignation of former city Administrator Larry Braden in April and, in July, the resignation of Councilwoman Kathy Bingham, who had previously been censured. Harassment alle-



Joseph City Councilor Lisa Collier, center, who then served as mayor pro-tem, listens as a resident addresses the council. She was sworn in as mayor Thursday, Sept. 2, 2021, after former Mayor Belinda Buswell resigned. At left is Pro-Tem Administrator Brock Eckstein, and at right is Administrative Assistant Jamie Collier.

gations also swirled around the council.

“It’s been difficult the entire time, if we’re honest,” she said.

Lisa Collier, the current mayor pro-tem, accepted the position of mayor during Thursday night’s City Council meeting, Pro-Tem Administrator Brock Eckstein said Friday.

Collier had but one proviso, Eckstein said.

“She said she would only take it if the full council supported the decision,” he said.

They did and she did. “I will do whatever the council would like me to do, but I want to make sure there’s support,” Collier said earlier Thursday.

She said her only agenda is simple.

“I feel like we’ve been through a lot,” she said. “I want to build trust with the

city, the city staff, the business owners, the public. I want to run the city with the citizens’ wishes and livelihood in mind. I don’t have a personal agenda.”

She’ll get to work at her new post with the next council meeting.

“At our next council meeting in October she will reassign committees,” Eckstein said.

Collier will serve out the remainder of Buswell’s four-year term, and will take the reins as the council has two vacancies to fill: her own and Bingham’s.

Eckstein said the city already has three applications for the vacant seats. The city will continue taking applications until Oct. 4 and consider them at the Oct. 7 meeting.

Buswell said she worked closely with Collier during the time she was the pro-tem.

“She was a great sounding board for me,” Buswell said.

She also believes good days are ahead for the current council.

“I think it’s in good shape, and I think things are going to keep going smooth,” she said. “I wish the council the best.”

Collier, who grew up in Joseph, was appointed to the council about two years ago under then-Mayor Sajonia. She currently serves on the Main Street Motif Committee and the Parks and Recreation Committee. She works for the Intermountain Education Services District as a teacher of special education and traumatized kids and preschool at Enterprise Elementary School. She and husband J.R. Collier have seven children, four of whom are grown and three attend Joseph Charter School.

“I want people to know about me and our lives. ... I want people to feel comfortable,” she said. “I feel I’m on good terms with

the public. ... We’ve got a lot of rebuilding to do and I want it seen as a positive change. ... I think there are good things happening and I want to continue that.”

Eckstein was enthusiastic about Collier’s tak-

ing the reins of the City Council.

“I think she’ll do a fantastic job. She doesn’t come in with any agenda,” he said. “She just wants to help city get back on its feet.”

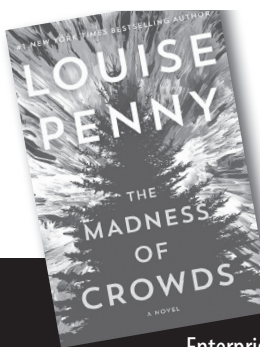


Belinda Buswell

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City of Joseph fully staffed, council told

Top-level vacancies remain

By BILL BRADSHAW
Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — The city of Joseph is fully staffed — except for a couple vacant council seats — the City Council was told during a virtual meeting Thursday, Sept. 2.

Pro-Tem City Administrator Brock Eckstein said two utility workers, a utility biller and an ordinance officer had been hired.

Michael Harshfield and Damion Salerno were hired as utility workers, Michelle Brock was hired as a utility biller and Douglas McKinnis was hired as the city’s ordinance officer.

“We’re still working on getting an administrator in here,” he said of the need to fill his position on a permanent basis.

The city has engaged a professional service that regularly finds management people in the Northwest, he said.

As for the vacant coun-

cil seats, several applications have been received and the city will continue to take them until Oct. 4. The council will consider the applications at its next meeting Oct. 7, at which time the council will elect a new mayor pro-tem to replace Lisa Collier, who was sworn in as mayor last week to replace the resigned Belinda Buswell.

Eckstein said he doesn’t yet know if the October council meeting will be virtual or in person.

“It just depends on how the COVID stuff shakes out,” he said.

In another matter, the council held the second of two public hearings on the method the city uses to calculate Systems Development Charges for the city’s water and sewer systems. As Eckstein explained, when a new house or business is built, the owner pays charges to connect to the water and sewer systems. The fees can range from several hundred to several thousand dollars, he said. The range is based on recommendations by the

city engineer.

The hearings are to give the public the chance to comment on the fees. One person spoke at the August meeting, but no one spoke at this month’s meeting. The public will get another chance to speak at the October meeting, after which the council is expected to vote to approve the methods for calculating the SDCs — or not, Eckstein said.

“People get confused,” he said. “They think we’re trying to assess SDCs right now. But it’s the method we could go down if we chose to establish the range of the fees we would implement and give the public the chance to speak.”

Also Thursday, the council heard a presentation by Howard Postovit, of the Oregon Department of Transportation, on the ongoing plans for handicapped-accessible curbs to be installed. Eckstein said the council was pleased with the presentation.

“It gave kind of a good, ‘warm-and-fuzzy’ on the whole project,” he said.

The city’s Main Street

Motif Committee will now meet with ODOT to finalize the plans.

In other matters, the council:

- Approved a resolution authorizing the city’s participation in the League of Oregon Cities’ Legal Advice Program. Eckstein said the program provides 20 free hours of legal advice each year.
- Approved a \$14,000 bid by Brian Walker’s Executive Tree Care to prune or eliminate 86 trees on Main Street and at the city park.
- Approved Eckstein’s request to sell as surplus the city’s 1998 Toyota Tacoma pickup. The city plans to replace it and others with some of the American Rescue Plan Act funds the city is receiving.
- Heard a brief presentation on the city’s ongoing public works projects from Lucas Stangel of Anderson Perry Engineers.



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