

# Joseph disbands ZORT, sets up Planning Commission

Move is to help with town's rapid growth

By **BILL BRADSHAW**  
Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — The Joseph City Council agreed to disband its Zoning Ordinance Task Force and replace it with an official Planning Commission during the council's meeting Feb. 3, interim city Administrator Brock Eckstein said Wednesday, Feb. 9.

"I think it was a really good step forward," Eckstein said. "Joseph's seen so much growth and expansion and this commission will give good direction to

address their rapid growth."

But the ordinance to formally create the Planning Commission had to be put on hold, as there were a couple items missing from the initial draft. In particular, the council wanted all members required to be registered voters in Wallowa County and wanted to allow property owners who own land within the city's urban growth boundary to be able to serve whether or not they live within the city limits. The UGB is the area on the outskirts of town that could likely be annexed into the city limits.

Eckstein said the final draft of the ordinance is expected to be ready for passage at the council's March meeting.

In another matter, Public Works Lead Levi Tickner was hired to take the new position of water and sewer plant operator on a full-time basis.

Eckstein said state guidelines show that the city needs a 1.15 full-time equivalent employee to handle the plants. At present, the work has fallen to the entire public works crew and no single employee has been devoted to the task.

"There's not enough time in the day to address all the plants' needs," Eckstein said. "Right now, there's no one dedicated to the plant operations to make sure plants are operating at 100% all the time."

The council agreed to

seek a replacement for Tickner as Public Works lead. Eckstein said that just as Tickner was entitled to having the first chance at the new position, any current employee who is qualified and desires the Public Works lead position has a similar first chance.

In other business, the council:

- Approved a three-year rental agreement for the Joseph Community Events Center at \$500 a month for Tenderfoot Christian Fellowship. The church also agreed to perform 20 hours a month of volunteer work.

The church has been meeting there since December, and this month's action was to formalize the agreement.

Eckstein said having the church use the events center has been beneficial for the city.

"They have been doing fantastic things such as cleaning it, served as DJs for school events," he said. "It's served the city of Joseph very well having that agreement."

- Renewed a 10-year franchise agreement with Rahn's Sanitation for waste disposal at residences and businesses within Joseph. Under the contract, a franchise fee of 3.5% will provide \$4,500-\$5,000 a year for city coffers.

- Heard an update from Eckstein on upcoming training for the council members on insurance and classes with the League of

Oregon Cities.

- Heard a brief update on ongoing public works projects from Brad Baird of Anderson Perry.

- Heard an update and took public input from the Oregon Department of Transportation on this year's planned work to upgrade sidewalks and ramps to conform with Americans with Disabilities Act standards.

The next regular council meeting will be at 7 p.m. March 3. Eckstein said Mayor Lisa Collier will decide about a week beforehand if an in-person meeting will be held, depending on the COVID-19 pandemic. A virtual meeting via Zoom will be held in either case.

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## Search fails to turn up Idaho angler

By **JAYSON JACOBY**  
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — A steelhead angler reported seeing what he believed was a body in the Snake River below Hells Canyon Dam on the morning of Feb. 4.

A team from the Baker County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue team brought a boat to the site, about one mile downriver from the Hells Canyon Visitors Center, hoping to recover the body of an Idaho fisherman, Alberto Sillonis, who went missing in the area on Jan. 17.

Searchers did not find the body, Sheriff Travis Ash said on Feb. 7.

The steelhead fisherman, who was fishing on the Oregon side of the river, reported seeing the body in a back eddy where the water is about 10 to 12 feet deep, Ash said.

The Baker County Dispatch Center received the report at 9:13 a.m. on Feb.

4. Ash said he and four others left the dock at the Visitors Center around 1 p.m. that day.

Ash said the searchers spent a few hours searching but did not find a body.

He said the current in the area is strong and unpredictable, and the sheriff's office does not have the ability to put a diver in the water at that site.

Ash said no additional searches are planned unless the Sheriff's Office receives new reports in the area.

The sheriff's office announced last month that it believes Sillonis, 85, of Weiser, drowned after falling from a dock into the river below the Visitors Center.

Sillonis had left his home on the morning of Jan. 17 and planned to return home that evening.

Relatives reported him missing about 6 p.m. that day when he failed to return.

Baker County deputies, along with deputies from the

Washington County Sheriff's Office in Idaho, began searching the route to Hells Canyon as well as checking hotels in nearby towns.

At about 9:07 p.m. on Jan. 17, deputies found Sillonis' 2008 Nissan Frontier pickup truck in the parking lot at the Hells Canyon Visitors Center.

Deputies searched the immediate vicinity and found two fishing poles, with the line from one still in the water, on the center dock.

On the morning of Jan. 18, searchers found a felt, short-brimmed hat on rocks about 60 feet from the dock, which Sillonis' family confirmed was his.

Idaho Power Company employees used a remote-operated vehicle with an underwater camera and sonar to search the river, but with no success.

Sillonis is a white man who stands 5-foot-8 and weighs about 160 pounds. He has white hair.

If anyone has information about Sillonis, they can call Ash at 541-523-6415.



Sillonis



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