

A meeting of councils

Wood Village officials visit Tribe to discuss Greyhound Park's future

By Brent Merrill

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The Grand Ronde Tribal Council hosted the Wood Village City Council in Grand Ronde for a meeting in Council Chambers on Friday, Feb. 19.

Wood Village is home to the shuttered 31-acre Multnomah Greyhound Park that was purchased by the Tribe last year for \$10 million as an economic development venture.

Wood Village is one-square mile of land eight miles east of Portland off of Interstate 84. It is home to fewer than 4,000 citizens and features a variety of commercial and industrial businesses. Historically, the city is located within the traditional homelands of the Cascade and Clackamas Chinook Tribes.

After visiting Wood Village in November after the Greyhound Park purchase became public, Grand Ronde Tribal Council members returned the favor and hosted the Wood Village City Council, which included Mayor Patricia Smith, City Manager Bill Peterson, Council President Timothy Clark and councilors T. Scott Harden, Bruce Nissan and Jimmy Frank.

Tribal Council hosted the visit, which included tours of the Tribe's cultural center and museum complex, Chachalu, then on to Uyxat Powwow Grounds, achaf-hammi plankhouse, Tribal housing and lunch at Spirit Mountain Casino.

Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno, who was joined by council members Jon A. George, Chris Mercier, Ed Pearsall, Tonya Gleason-Shepek, Denise Harvey and Brenda Tuomi, began the meeting by sharing the Tribe's history and providing background for the tour of the Tribal homelands.

Also in attendance were Tribal staff members Titu Asghar, who is the Tribe's Economic Development director and his department's Administrative Assistant Meghan Zimbrick, Chief of Staff Stacia Martin, Tribal Attorney Rob Greene and Finance Officer Chris Leno.

Leno said that the Tribe was terminated in 1954 and restored in 1983. He said there are currently about 5,300 Grand Ronde Tribal members who live all over the world.

Leno said that the Tribe's economic practice follows the wishes of its Elders and includes Tribal endowments, as well as that the Tribe harvests and sells approximately 7 million board feet of timber annually from the Reservation lands.

Leno then talked about the importance of powwow events each year and the grounds, and what the structures at the powwow grounds mean to the Tribe's culture.

"It's a remarkable achievement," said Smith of the Tribe's accomplishments. "I'm excited about



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal Council member Jon A. George, right, talks about the Tribe's ceded lands with Wood Village Human Resources and Records Manager Greg Dirks, left, and Wood Village City Councilor T. Scott Harden during a visit of city officials with Tribal Council on Friday, Feb. 19. Wood Village officials took a tour of Grand Ronde, including the Chachalu Museum & Cultural Center.

our partnership with you. You're investing a lot of money in our town and other businesses are looking forward to you being there."

"You want to diversify and I think that's a good thing," said Clark. "I applaud you."

When Clark inquired about what the Tribe has planned for the property, Leno said that Tribal Council has been busy running a government.

"I can honestly say from our discussions that we're waiting for that building to come down before we can really have a view," said Leno. "There are going to be a lot of things that are going to be looked at. We haven't even got to that point yet."

Asghar said the meeting was an informational exchange. He said the Wood Village City Council visit also served as an opportunity to learn more about each other.

"We had a very nice, very frank conversation," said Asghar. "Obviously, we are acquiring land in our ceded lands. It has cultural and economic significance to us. Our goal for this acquisition is economic diversification."

"We invited them to come here as a cultural exchange and to come and see who we are. I think it was fabulous. I think they were very impressed. They're hoping when we develop something there that we will bring our culture there."

Culture is important to the leadership of Wood Village, members said individually and collectively, and council members also shared that they were already working on development in the area.

"We are very early in a program that will develop a master plan for the entire town center and that includes the properties that you all have acquired as well as the remaining 50 plus acres that are in a variety of other partnerships on the site," said Peterson. "We have just concluded a cultural feedback group that included the Ukraini-

ans, the Russians, the Laotians, the Vietnamese and the Hispanic communities; all that have provided their cultural viewpoints about what would be important for development in our community. I hope that we can move forward collectively. What is good for you all should be good for us."

"I think it will be," said Smith. "We have got to work together."

"This has to be an ongoing partnership," said George.

"Once the building is down there will be collective shouts of joy from all over the village," said Smith. "You all should take your time and do what's going to be best for your Tribe and that will be best for us."

"I can't even imagine all the hard work and the pain that you have all gone through with the obstacles that have been thrown your way. And now you have come to all this and it's a remarkable achievement. I can't even imagine how you did it."

Tuomi said she felt the visitors were impressed with the Tribe's culture and how it cares for its people.

"I absolutely loved this meeting," said Tuomi. "I got the sense from their city manager that they would really like to see our culture up there. That made me feel so excited. I think that was a very important step for them to come here and get to know us and see what we do. It was vital."

"I wanted to start building a relationship. It was really exciting for me. It really made me proud. When they left I felt like we were saying

goodbye to friends."

"I truly did, too," said George.

"We want this partnership because if it can happen in Wood Village then everybody wins," said Mercier. "We want the membership to know that we (Tribal Council) are looking ahead. Buying this property is a sign that we are taking this seriously and we are exploring all of our options."

Mercier said he sees potential for the property.

"I'm just open to anything and it's a prime piece of real estate," said Mercier. "There are a lot of possibilities there. Portland is growing and I think any sort of venture the Tribe can get into in the Portland area is good. We've been trying to branch out economically for years now. I think there is a lot of potential."

Asghar said the Tribe's priority is the demolition of the aging and dilapidated Multnomah Greyhound Park building and that that process should begin in April. Until the demolition is complete, the Tribe has hired a firm to provide around-the-clock security on the property.

"The building is completely unsafe," said Asghar. "The track is overgrown as are the sheds and the dog kennels. It has been dormant for the last 20 years."

Asghar said the total demolition cost to remove the existing structure completely and have the ground shovel-ready is estimated at \$2 million.

Another priority for the Tribe is to hire a project manager for site development. Asghar said the Tribe is looking for a particular set of skills.

"What we are looking for is someone who has done this before," said Asghar. "We are looking for someone with past experience, someone who understands the city, the community and the county. We want a stakeholder who has a stake in the game and we want someone everyone can trust."

"We're looking for someone from around here that has a relationship with the city and with us. That will be key. We're looking for someone who can manage the expectations of the two councils."

Asghar said a request for proposals has already been issued and that a project manager should start working in March.

The sale of the park land to the Tribe was listed in The Village News as the city's biggest story for 2015. The Grand Ronde Tribe has previously invested in Multnomah County with the Russellville Commons project, the Gregory Lofts building and the Tribe's Portland-based office located off Barbur Boulevard. ■

Bike helmets available

The Tribe's Social Services Department has bicycle helmets available for distribution. Those needing a helmet need to visit the department and sign a helmet application, as well as get fitted.

For more information, contact Social Services at 503-879-2034. ■