

Tribal Council sends constitutional amendment proposal to Interior

By Dean Rhodes
Smoke Signals editor

Tribal voters will have a seventh opportunity to amend the Tribal Constitution in early 2019 after Tribal Council voted on Wednesday, Oct. 24, to move forward with a proposed amendment designed to address the issue of siblings who are not Tribal members despite having brothers and sisters who are and have the same parent(s).

The proposed amendment to the Tribal Constitution would amend Article V to allow for the enrollment of applicants who have enrolled brothers and sisters by the same Tribal parent(s) who were enrolled before Sept. 14, 1999, and who meet pre-1999 constitutional enrollment requirements.

Applicants also must meet the five-year relinquishment requirement if they have enrolled in another Tribe.

Tribal Council was encouraged to move the proposed amendment forward by a positive Sept. 8 advisory vote. Tribal voters favored a similarly worded proposal 839 to 365, for a 69.7 percent majority. To change the Tribal Constitution, two-thirds of those voting must approve of the change.

Only two proposed constitutional amendment changes have ever received sufficient yes votes to pass — the July 1999 enrollment requirements and the February 2008 proposal to increase the relinquishment period from one to five years.

Other proposals have either failed to garner the two-thirds majority mandated by the Tribal Constitution or have been defeated.

The proposed amendment will be submitted to the Secretary of the Interior for the calling of an election. Once the Bureau of Indian Affairs receives the Tribal Council resolution, the election must be held within 90 days.

Since the election will be supervised by the BIA, Tribal members wanting to vote on the issue will have to specially register. Then, two-thirds of those who vote will

Previous Tribal Constitution elections				
Date	Yes	No	% yes	Topic
July '99	757	292	72.1	Enrollment
Feb. '08	636	513	55	Grand Ronde blood
Feb. '08	700	450	60.9	Parent on the roll
Feb. '08	880	277	76	Relinquishment period
Nov. '11	457	536	46	Enrollment
June '12	407	222	64.7	Primary election
March '15	391	220	64	Term limits
March '15	230	381	37.6	Remove BIA
July '16	382	670	36.3	Initiatives, etc.
July '16	412	639	39.2	Enrollment

(Bold signifies successful amendment elections)

have to approve for the amendment to pass, as well as 30 percent of those who registered must cast a ballot for the election to count.

“This is the next step,” Tribal Council member Kathleen George said during the Tuesday, Oct. 16, Legislative Action Committee meeting. “It is much more formal. ... This is the same issue raised in the advisory vote even though we now have to work through this very formal process.”

Tribal Council Vice Chair Chris Mercier said that he has always wondered why Tribal members make the effort to register to vote in BIA-supervised constitutional amendment elections, but then do not follow through by actually voting.

In the last three constitutional amendment elections held in 2016, 2015 and 2012, an average of 1,248 Tribal members have registered to vote, but the turnout has only averaged 61.3 percent.

“For whatever reason when people register, there is always a drop-off in the number of people that actually vote, which I’ve never understood because you’re usually voting within several weeks of registering,” Mercier said during the Legislative Action Committee meeting. “A lot of people register and don’t cast their ballots.”

As of the Sept. 8 Tribal Council election, more than 4,150 Tribal members were 18 or older, making them eligible to vote in a Tribal

election.

In a complementary action, Tribal Council also voted to appoint the Tribe’s Election Board – Deanna Johnston, Michael Mercier, Sharon Hanson, Victor Cureton and Daniel Strobel – to serve on the constitutional amendment Election Board.

Tribal Council is planning yet-to-be scheduled educational sessions regarding the constitutional amendment election in Grand Ronde, Portland and Eugene.

- In other action, Tribal Council:
- Approved restoration and preservation work on the Grand Ronde Depot as the Tribe’s proposed project for a \$100,000 Spirit Mountain Community Fund Oregon Tribal Grant. The depot, which housed the Tribe’s first offices following 1983’s Restoration, is the only building in Grand Ronde on the National Register of Historic Places.
 - Approved an amendment to the already approved Green Shark Logging Unit that is now estimat-

ed to bring the Tribe \$417,713 in revenue. The sale was amended to reflect lower timber prices since the sale was originally approved in September.

- Authorized the Tribal Attorney’s Office to contract for legal services with Sonosky, Chambers Sachse, Endreson & Perry to represent the Tribe in a multi-district opioid litigation on a contingency fee basis.
- Approved the agenda for the 11 a.m. Sunday, Nov. 4, General Council meeting to be held in the Tribal gym. The meeting will review the proposed 2019 Tribal budget.

Also included in the Oct. 24 Tribal Council packet were approved authorizations to proceed that appointed Tribal Council member Steve Bobb Sr. to the Chemawa Station LLC Board of Directors and OK’d a letter to Pembina Pipeline Corp. accepting the company’s invitation for the Tribe to participate on the Jordan Cove Cultural Resources Working Group.

Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy made the cultural presentation to open the meeting, reading background on the Tribe’s historical relationship with Willamette Falls and ceremonial fishing at the site.

Kennedy said the Tribe’s current construction of a fishing platform at Willamette Falls is about “our right to exist as a people. Fishing at the falls means all of that. ... It’s a wonderful time for Grand Ronde.”

The entire meeting can be viewed by visiting the Tribal website at www.grandronde.org and clicking on the News tab and then Video. ■

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