

Tribal Council votes ‘no’ on amendments to SMGI Board selection process

By Danielle Harrison
Smoke Signals editor

Tribal Council voted against approving amendments to the Spirit Mountain Gaming Inc. articles of incorporation that would have put the board in charge of recruiting director candidates, reduced reserved Tribal Council member seats by one and increased non-Tribal Council seats by one, during its Wednesday, Sept. 11, meeting.

If approved, the amendments would have decreased specifically reserved Tribal Council seats from five to four and increased non-Tribal Council seats from six to seven.

The vote was 4 in favor, with Vice Chair Chris Mercier, Kathleen George, Brenda Tuomi and Denise Harvey voting yes, and Matthew Haller, Lisa Leno, Jon A. George and newly elected Tonya Gleason-Shepek voting no.

Tribal Council Chair Cheryle A. Kennedy cast the tie-breaking vote, which is required when it is 4-4.

“We are not approving this resolution,” she said. “Maybe it needs to be reworked to better satisfaction...Thank you to all of those who worked on it.”

The proposed resolution had been added to the agenda for approval after a 5-3 recommendation at a Legislative Action Committee meeting the day prior. Kathleen George, then-Secretary Michael Cherry, Mercier, Tuomi and Harvey were in favor of the changes. Haller, Leno and Jon A. George were not.

Before the resolution failed to pass during the Tribal Council meeting, Kathleen George, who serves on the SMGI Board, explained the reasoning behind one of the proposed changes after a Tribal Elder spoke out against its approval.

“I certainly appreciate what you had to say about the 5-member representation from council and I think the board would be delighted if we could have five council members on there,” she said. “We just for several years have not had five who were interested in serving. This amendment doesn’t preclude that. It just allows that if Tribal Council members don’t want to serve, they can fill it with other people...I think we should move forward with the process underway. This was primarily to allow for flexibility, so we

get enough board members.”

According to information shared in June Legislative Action Committee and Tribal Council meetings during a contested board appointment process, boards for Oregon Tribal casinos typically do the recruitment, appointing and replacing for their board members. The Grand Ronde Tribal Council took on the responsibility officially in 2018 from the SMGI Board.

Regardless of whether Tribal Council or the SMGI Board do the recruiting, council has the final decision on any board appointments.

- In other action, Tribal Council:
- Approved reappointing Kennedy as Tribal Council chairwoman and appointed Jon A. George as Tribal Council secretary;
 - Approved a data sharing agreement with the Oregon Department of Education for a study update. The study tracks disparities in educational outcomes between Tribal students and their peers within the state’s public education system;
 - Approved accepting a funding award of \$298,495 from the US Forest Service Landscape Scale

Restoration Program to implement ecological burning on seven conservation properties;

- Approved a memorandum of understanding with Indian Health Service for the Tribe’s Wind River Apartments phase 3 project. The Tribe secured up to \$1 million in funding to cover the cost for constructing new water and sanitary mains to service the project;
- Approved amending an agreement with GBD Architects of Portland for up to \$309,234 for its work on the master plan agreement for tumwata village in Oregon City;
- Approved amending a contract with David Evans and Associates of Salem for up to \$864,352 for design services related to phase 1 infrastructure improvements at tumwata village;
- And approved enrolling one infant into the Tribe because they meet the enrollment requirements outlined in the Tribal Constitution and Enrollment Ordinance.

To watch the entire meeting, visit the Tribal government’s website at www.grandronde.org and click on the Videos tab. ■

Facebook Live event features information on upcoming election

By Danielle Harrison
Smoke Signals editor

The Tribe held a Facebook Live event on Wednesday, Sept. 25, to provide more information to Tribal members about the upcoming lineal descent constitutional amendment election.

Lineal descent will once again be put to a vote on Monday, Dec. 9. The Tribe’s Election Board will be meeting with the Bureau of Indian Affairs during the first week of October. BIA administers the election as per the

Tribal Constitution. Approximately 100 people logged on to the virtual event.

“The process for a constitutional amendment has been going on for quite a while,” Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy said. “I want to thank those who participated in the many meetings for the amendment language. Every time we had a meeting or a survey, that language was refined...it took a lot of time but it was the most important thing we could have undertaken.

Being a Tribe is a unique quality...we’re a nation of people, made up of our members.”

The election requires advance voter registration and packets will be sent to all eligible voters after BIA meets with the Election Board.

If approved, the amendment will change enrollment from a 1/16 blood quantum requirement to requiring the applicant possess Grand Ronde Indian blood and be a descendant of a Grand Ronde parent or grandparent, provided that the ancestor was not enrolled in error. Additionally, the 1999 enrollment amendment requirements will be removed, including the requirements to be born to a Tribal member and have a parent enrolled at the time of application.

Additionally, an annual limit of 150 people will be accepted per year. This can be raised to 200 if Tribal Council adopts a resolution to do so. The limit will not apply to minors under 6 months old or those who are the subject of pending juvenile dependency hearings.

The Tribe decided to keep the definition of “Indian blood,” as an enrollment requirement after it became aware of a few Tribal members who are enrolled and do not have any Grand Ronde blood. They were adopted by Tribal members and enrolled as biological children, which occurred prior to DNA requirements. This provision will ensure their descendants will not be enrolled.

Kennedy urged everyone to look at the special edition of the Tilixam Wawa, which is dedicated to the upcoming election and was mailed to adult Tribal members already.

“I urge you to read it thoroughly,”

she said. “This is an exciting time and everyone should thoroughly look at the information.”

Since 1999, the membership has voted on eight enrollment-related constitutional amendments.

In August 2019, the Tribe published a special issue of the Tilixam Wawa to provide information to the membership regarding enrollment related issues. Since then, there have been community meetings, Tribal member workshops, surveys, and outside entities have researched and provided a report on the Tribe’s enrollment history.

Following the most recent round of meetings and workshops, the Tribe’s 2023 advisory vote was 65.328% of Tribal members in favor of moving forward with a lineal descent constitutional amendment.

Attending the Facebook Live event were Kennedy, Tribal Council Vice Chair Chris Mercier and Tribal Council members Tonya Gleason-Shepek, Brenda Tuomi and Kathleen George, with Tribal Communications Director Sara Thompson fielding questions asked on Facebook.

All attendees were encouraged to visit the Tribe’s website, www.grandronde.org, to learn more about the upcoming election. It includes the amendment language, presentation information, a frequently asked questions section and a survey link.

The Tribe started holding monthly Facebook Live events after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 to safely keep Tribal members informed about the Tribe and its activities. They are now held on a more irregular schedule and deal with a variety of issues. ■

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Tribal library displays banned books

The week of Sept. 22-28 was deemed “Banned Book Week,” so the Tribal Library set up a display with books that have been banned in schools and libraries. In the Smoke Signals video, Tribal Librarian Kathy Cole explains why the books have been banned and why it is important to display them.

For more information contact
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