

FIRES from page 1A

"We are still responding to multiple calls each day for individuals using chain saws or with small fires in their yard. Anything that can produce a spark is not allowed during these extreme fire conditions," warned Schick. "This is only a very small percentage of our citizens acting dangerously. For the most part, our neighbors act responsibly but it only takes one fire associated with strong, hot winds to start a conflagration."

Some of the other causes of fires in the area are related to the high winds and unseasonably warm temperatures the Siuslaw region — and the Pacific Northwest in general — are currently undergoing. "Recently we have seen many power lines arcing in the trees when the wind is

blowing. So far, there haven't been any large fires resulting from these arcing power lines — but we have had a few smaller fires which only require a change in our current weather conditions to become a very large fire," Schick said. "We experienced an atypical weather pattern on Monday evening with strong, dry, hot winds which is the one thing that concerns us the most. Those are the types of conditions that encourage rapid fire growth and that is why we have been seeing these fires around Oregon grow very rapidly."

Schick also reported strong east winds were lined up with multiple major fires to the east, bringing smoke and ash into the area. Along with the sudden influx of smoke and ash, Florence's 911 dispatch center began to receive mul-

tiples calls from citizens who smelled and saw the smoke and reported fires in Florence.

Schick said SVFR takes all of these calls seriously and sent resources to check on each reported fire.

Fortunately, all of those reports turned out to be unfounded.

Schick also clarified the situation surrounding the recent Sweet Creek fire.

"We were fortunate not to have these kinds of temperatures and winds during the Sweet Creek fire. With that fire, it was the terrain that made firefighting exceptionally difficult and dangerous," Schick said. "Having multiple aircraft available to place fire retardant and water around the perimeter really slowed fire spread down so that hand-

crews could safely work on the fire line."

He added that with the current strain on firefighting resources around Oregon and the rest of the Western U.S., the Siuslaw region may not be able to receive the same kind of air support that it did two weeks ago should another large fire break out in our area.

"If we did have a fire, our very well-trained local firefighters, including personnel from the Oregon Department of Forestry who are stationed in this area, would initiate a fire attack while requesting additional resources from around the state," Schick explained. "We saw a great example of that with the Sweet Creek fire. Units from SVFR joined with firefighters from the Mapleton and Swisshome/ Deadwood fire

departments along with ODF firefighters to begin fire suppression efforts."

This week's extreme smoke conditions raised the very real possibility that residents might wish to — or be required to — evacuate the area.

Schick clarified the process that would be involved in that type of decision.

"We received many calls this week concerning where people would evacuate to if requested, and how they would be notified. That would be a situation in which we would be working very closely with Lane County Emergency Management and the City of Florence in determining where the safest place would be for people to evacuate to," Schick said. "Notification would be done by reverse 911 calls in which

all land lines in a specific area would receive a message with evacuation instructions."

Additionally, text messages and emails from Lane County would also be sent to those who have signed up for emergency alerts.

Residents are encouraged to go to the Lane County Emergency Management web page to sign up for notifications and further information.

Schick also added another reason to be aware of and prepared in the event of an evacuation order.

"Law enforcement and fire personnel would go door to door making sure everyone has left the area," said Schick. "If we can be certain that people have evacuated, then firefighters can concentrate on the main concern — fighting the fire."

MEETINGS from page 1A

This meeting was the opportunity for the applicant to provide answers or responses to those concerns.

The issues addressed in a memo from Planning Director Wendy-Farley Campbell to the applicant cited a number of elements regarding the expected traffic increases related to the development that needed to be addressed. These included traffic volume, seasonal and COVID-19-related traffic adjustments, left turn assessment from Rhododendron Ave., sight distance requirements and the crash history of the area.

The updated information was presented to the city by Kittelson and Associates, hired as a consultant by the petitioner.

One of the conditions for approval, as determined by the city, was a requirement that more information be collected and presented to the commission on these topics. 3J provided responses to the traffic concerns, then requested the city's condition be removed, expressing that they believe requirements had been met for providing data.

"Updated turning movement counts were conducted during the weekday morning (7 to 9 a.m.) and weekday evening (4 to 6 p.m.) commuter peak hours, consistent with the time periods scoped for the analysis," FarleyCampbell stated in her memo to the commission. "Turning movement counts were conducted on a mid-week day in August 2020, and the unadjusted (raw) traffic volumes are provided in Attachment A."

FarleyCampbell explained that the August 2020 raw traffic volumes were adjusted to compensate for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the adjustment based on data provided by ODOT for the Florence automatic traffic recorder.

"The 2020 traffic volumes were found to be 1.6 percent lower in August 2020 than in August 2019 and the August 2020 raw volumes were increased accordingly," said FarleyCampbell.

She also told commis-

sioners the available crash data at the Rhododendron Drive/35th Street intersection was revisited and reviewed for a variety of factors including type, severity, general conditions and location in order to identify potential crash patterns or anomalies.

No documented crash history had been reported in the most recent five years per ODOT records, added FarleyCampbell, who said no crash patterns were identified that warrant mitigation as a result of the proposed development.

Additional details and the raw crash data sheets were included in the August 2020 traffic impact analysis document. She also stated the available stopping sight distance (SSD) was reviewed along Rhododendron Drive for vehicles approaching 35th Street in the southbound direction and, based on a 40 MPH posted speed, the desired design SSD is 305 feet. The available SSD is over 450 feet, well in excess of the 305-foot minimum desired value — leading to the conclusion that stopping sight distance is sufficient.

The second major response presented to the commissioners on behalf of the applicants was related to the stormwater issue. Public Works Director Mike Miller has made extensive presentations to the commissioners on the inability of the city's wastewater infrastructure to handle the expected stormwater runoff that would accompany the PUD.

3J cited both the city required conditions, and the action being taken in response to those conditions, in materials provided to commissioners during the meeting. Included in the city's conditions was that, prior to receiving approvals for final PUD, the developer needed to obtain the services of a qualified hydrogeologist (not only a geologist) and perhaps someone that is a coastal geomorphologist to supplement the proposed stormwater plan and assist in preparation of the Phase 1 Site Investigation Report.

"A hydrogeologist is engaged on this project and will provide a solution in

conjunction with the project water resources engineer to meet the existing condition," Serra wrote in response. "A Phase 1 Site Investigation Report and a supplemental memo from the consultant engineering team will be provided at the final PUD stage. We accept the condition as written."

These were just the most significant of the issues discussed by the commission and the information was received with questions from some commissioners. However, the discussion was left unfinished as Commissioner Sandy Young had additional questions following the presentation by Johnston, Miller and FarleyCampbell.

"I'm concerned they will have moved far enough into their development activity that we will not necessarily get a stormwater plan that really does what it needs to do, which is to detain and meter out at the same rate as the stormwater is leaving the site now," Young said.

There was then a general agreement that the issues raised by Young were valid and the commissioners decided to revisit the stormwater issue at their next meeting scheduled for Sept. 22.

TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

The Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) also met this week after a long hiatus due to COVID-19, with a limited agenda primarily

consisting of updating the committee on the status of the city-related transportation services and measures being taken in regard to the pandemic.

Senior City Planner Johnston was again on hand for the city and walked council members through the process used by the local operator of the city transit system, River City Taxis, in response to the dangers presented by the virus.

Johnston recapped the city policies which have incorporated the Oregon Health Authority guidelines for all city services including transportation. Johnston reported the buses are cleaned before, during and after the routes.

She then introduced John Ahlen, Accessible Services Program Manager for Lane County Transit District, who spoke regarding the protocols in place for the Florence-to-Eugene connector service.

Ahlen said one of the most important ways LTD was mitigating the exposure was simple.

"We have asked the members of the public not to travel whenever possible, unless it is an essential need. We just ask people to be reasonable in the ways they schedule and plan their travel," Ahlen said.

Josh Haring, owner of River City and a member of the TAC, reviewed the procedures in place and

how the pandemic in some instances cut ridership. But in the case of the Florence Municipal Airport, pick-ups have increased.

Committee Vice President Terry Tomeny echoed Haring's observations, adding the airport had been an integral part of the response to recent wildfires in the area.


"The airport has been pretty busy even though the office is closed due to COVID, but we have more planes coming in than we are used to," Tomeny said.

"There were helicopters staged out of the airport and they had refueling crews on the ground and everything went well as far as we know."

Other items discussed during the meeting included the need to update the committee workplan and the goals of the TAC in the future.

The next TAC meeting is scheduled for Oct. 8, beginning at 2:30 p.m.

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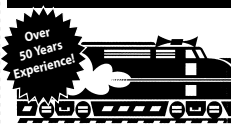
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