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In that time, EMAC shifted focus, putting an emphasis on trees, though politics continued to flare up. In a Sept. 15, 2020, meeting, new chair Katie Prosser, with the help of committee member Harvey, attempted to block an entry on the city's agenda. The item was a public comment request by local climate activist Michael Allen, who wanted to ask the committee to help spread the word about an online Lane County Climate Survey. (26)

As for Harvey, political actions outside EMAC have also begun to affect the city.

A Sept. 26 meet-and-greet sponsored by Lane County Republicans received complaints before it began because it was a partisan event being held at FEC, which was owned

by the city and the public.

"I think all candidates for public offices (including Democrats, Independents, Working Families, etc.) should be invited, don't you? We will be happy to share the costs," Karin Radtke, chair of the Florence Democratic Club, wrote Harvey after thanking her for organizing the event.

Harvey replied, "We are inviting city non-partisan candidates as a courtesy. We will continue with the Republican candidates as planned." (27)

A respectful Q&A took place, but complaints were raised on social media after a photo of the event in the *Siuslaw News* showed little social distancing and a lack of mask wearing by some in the audience. Though, as reported in the story covering the event, guidelines for contact tracing and sani-

tizing were followed, the City of Florence was now facing additional controversy over its handling of EMAC, the FEC and partisanship in the city.

"Left leaning"

Throughout 2019, the CEDC did a tremendous amount of work on updating housing codes. It created a special subcommittee to work with 3J Consulting, an outside firm that guides cities with community planning and civil engineering. The firm also partners with private companies for projects, particularly housing developments. (28)

Sitting on the CEDC's subcommittee were Ashmead, Bill Prosser, David Montes and Robbie Wright. By the end of 2019, the committee was finishing up its housing code update recommen-

dations with the help of 3J Consulting. When work started, a slew of big projects were announced through the Planning Commission throughout 2019 and 2020. Among them was a private project at Rhododendron Drive and 35th Street which, if approved, will see the construction of 31 detached single-family residences, 49 single-family attached residences and 46 multi-family units.

The applicant for that development, APIC Florence Holdings, is being represented by 3J Consulting.

APIC, which owns Florence Golf Links, is currently awaiting the approval process — with a final decision to be made by the Florence City Council in the coming weeks. (29, 30)

Nationally, and even statewide, APIC has come

under fire for its involvement in politics, including illegal contributions to multiple candidates. (31, 32)

Siuslaw News has found no evidence that APIC-Florence or APIC itself has donated funds to local — or even regional — political races.

In 2020, new CEDC members had to be chosen after a series of resignations, including Montes, Kurt Vander Bogart and Graham Ross. Remarkably, 24 people applied for six open positions. The final picks included re-seating Prosser, David West and Dan Lofy, a local contractor who was a city council candidate for the 2020 race, but who dropped out after claims of harassment against him and his campaign.

From boycotts to protests; from social media rumors to race-war fly-

ers stuffed into mailboxes around Florence and Dunes City; from elected officials feeling threatened to an outburst of "f--k you Joe" by a councilor's spouse during a virtual public meeting, the challenges in covering local politics have grown exponentially since 2018 — and so has the learning curve in objective reporting during a time of such partisan division.

As a result, *Siuslaw News* has played its own role in fueling some of the rising partisanship within our community despite its best efforts to the contrary.

In the next edition on Oct. 10, as we approach the end of this investigative series on Oct. 17, *Siuslaw News* will explore how it was unprepared for the wave of partisanship that began to sweep through local government and the community, how it overlooked some obvious connections to individuals and partisan groups working to establish a foothold early on, ways in which our own coverage fueled accusations of being a "left leaning" newspaper, and how some soul searching to avoid the mistakes made in 2018 led to the discoveries that sparked a year-long investigation culminating in this unprecedented series.

To see references to this article, go to siuslawnews.com/article/source-links-documents-for-community-selection-investigation-part-iii.

(To read past installments in this series, visit www.siuslawnews.com and click the "Special Investigations" tab on the drop-down menu.)



Siuslaw News Winter Gear Drive
Until October 31st
148 Maple Street, Historic Old Town.

Donations given to Helping Hands of Florence

This October The Siuslaw News is having a winter gear drive to help those in need in our community. Please help give the gift of warmth by donating jackets, rain coats, tarps and tents.

You may drop off your donated items at The Siuslaw News 148 Maple St. in Historic Old Town Florence. Donations accepted until October 31st.

Donations will be given to Helping Hands of Florence, that provides meals and assistance for needy and homeless people in Florence, Oregon.

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