



Faith Center bids Hovets farewell, page 8A



From the Fields: Brice Creek Croft and feeding a community, page 6A

School Zone returns — Inside this edition!



Cottage Grove Sentinel

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Ballot Box



The lowdown on each of the fall election's ballot measures

Measure 20-262:

Shall the City's gas tax increase from \$.03 per gallon to \$.06 per gallon?

BY JON STINNETT
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

Summary: If adopted by the voters, this measure would increase the City's gas tax by \$.03 per gallon, for a total city gas tax of \$.06 per gallon. Revenues from the City's gas tax are used exclusively to construct, reconstruct, improve and maintain city streets. The proposed increase in the City's gas tax would create more revenue for road construction, maintenance and repair in the City.

Background: Talk of the need to repair Cottage Grove's dilapidated streets has been a big part of the public conversation for years. Roads such as South Sixth Street that act as connectors to funnel traffic from lower to higher areas of concentration garner much of the public's criticism, though many of the City's 42 miles of roads are in poor condition and contribute to an estimated \$9.4 million backlog of needed repairs.

The City Council began a discussion of how to address that backlog at a worksession prior to the City's budget process this spring, and the Council came back in August to approve sending the gas tax hike to voters in the November election. Cottage Grove will join the cities of Coburg and Springfield in seeking such a hike this fall, with Springfield also seeking a \$.03 increase per gallon.

The City receives about \$300,000 per year in gas tax revenue, a number that seldom changes much but would essentially double if the tax is doubled. Still, City Manager Richard Meyers told the City Council this spring that even doubling the tax would likely not be enough to fund major road overhaul projects given constantly rising construction costs. Projects such as West Main and R Street are expected to cost over \$1.2 million. While acknowledging that increased tax revenue was not going to repair all the City's streets, Meyers stated that it "would help," adding that the City pays for maintenance such as street striping and lighting that could be addressed with tax funding.

"The tax will have to increase, because it doesn't keep up with inflation," he said.

The Council gave its unanimous (yet unenthusiastic) approval to refer the higher tax to voters at its Aug. 8 meeting, though several councilors said they understood that the higher tax would not fill the funding gap. Councilor Jake Boone even voiced favor for seeking a much higher increase.

Many on the Council also claimed to be in favor of seeking a bond to fund specific road projects. Councilor Mike Fleck said he believed that approach would be best since bonding could allow the infrastructure under tattered roads to be repaired simultaneously. Fleck said he believed voters would be in favor of the tax because road issues are the most common complaints he hears as a public representative.

Vandalism, thefts prompt Main St. meeting

BY SAM WRIGHT
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

Various Main Street business owners gathered at the Cottage Grove Armory to discuss the increasing rate of crime and suspicious activity happening around the area on Tuesday, Sept. 20. Cottage Grove Main Street Coordinator Shauna Neigh invited newly appointed Police Chief Scott Shepherd to speak on how to prevent things such as theft and also on how to assist police in catching perpetrators.

There has been a recurring pattern of shoplifting, and many businesses report that they have

lost a significant sum of money in inventory lost. One business owner (who wished to not be named) said that a woman who many of the owners are familiar with had repeatedly tried to sell stolen items to her shop.

While the business owners brainstormed reasons for the increase in crime (such as the slight increase in homelessness in Cottage Grove), Chief Shepherd gave useful tips to help fight this sort of criminal activity.

"Firstly, motion lights and cameras are huge deterrents," Shepherd said. The use of devices such as these has proven across the country to deter criminals away from places. But Shepherd

also recognized that those things can be expensive and that there is a yearning for suspects to be caught and held accountable for their actions. So, instead of deterrents and preventative measures, Shepherd also discussed how to help police catch subjects.

"It's really important to be observant and note details of the suspicious person's appearance," he said. Most of the time, witnesses can get descriptions quite wrong. Shepherd also said that immediate communication and reporting of crimes is extremely helpful, not only to police, but to other community members and businesses in the area.

Please see MEETING, Page 9A



Would-be mayors talk shop

photo by Jon Stinnett

From left, mayoral candidates Mike Fleck, Jake Boone and Jeff Gowing enjoy a moment of levity before the mayoral forum at City Hall on Thursday, Sept. 22. A similar forum for City Council candidates was scheduled for Tuesday, Sept. 27.

BY JON STINNETT
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

Deteriorating streets, property crime, low housing inventory — last week's mayoral forum took on many of the issues affecting life (and government) in Cottage Grove, and responses from the three candidates for mayor in the November election offered a look at how each might approach the position.

Candidates and current City Councilors Mike Fleck, Jake Boone and Jeff Gowing joined the Cottage Grove Chamber of Commerce

and a sizable crowd at City Hall Thursday night to offer their outlook on the City's future and how they might help shape it. Cameron Reiten, owner and radio personality at Cottage Grove's KNND, moderated the forum along with this reporter. The forum was broadcast live via Facebook. The candidates were given two minutes to introduce themselves, then tackled a list of questions each had been given beforehand.

Fleck, who is currently serving his third council term, told the crowd during opening remarks

that Cottage Grove would be well-served regardless of its choice for mayor.

"It's lucky in this election that I like and respect both other candidates," he said. "The citizens will do well whatever their choice. None of us is going to do a poor job."

For Boone, who has lived in Cottage Grove with a wife and two children for about 10 years, being mayor is about using facts and not emotions to make decisions. Boone admitted in his introduction that he would likely make mistakes and would appreciate hearing about

them.

"We have to do the best we can with what we have to work with," he said. "When we're wrong, we have to fix it and move on. Everything I do is related to that."

For his part, Gowing repeatedly emphasized his local roots, pointing out that he's part of the third generation of his family to grow up here and that he returned after military service.

"I came back here by choice to stay here," Gowing said. "Since

Please see FORUM, Page 10A

City: More information needed to plan bridge repair

BY JON STINNETT
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

More information from the engineers who diagnosed structural problems at a popular pedestrian footbridge is necessary before determining the next steps to fix the bridge, the Cottage Grove City Council heard at its Monday night meeting.

The City recently contracted with OBEC Consulting Engineers for inspections of many of its bridges, and the report about the swinging footbridge that spans the Coast Fork of the Willamette River between Madison Ave. and River

Road in Cottage Grove contained a stern warning about its condition.

In a letter dated Sept. 14, OBEC's Brad Larsen detailed the "critical condition of the bridge and our serious concern for the safety of the public due to the potential collapse of the bridge."

Larsen wrote that OBEC last inspected the bridge in 2002 "and repairs were recommended to be completed on the towers as soon as possible," work that was never completed. The City closed the bridge to all traffic after receiving the letter, and it remains closed.

At Monday's meeting, Cottage Grove Public Works Director Jan Wellman talked about why

the repairs didn't happen. Wellman offered a status report on the bridge in place of City Manager Richard Meyers, who was out of town attending a conference.

"They were referring to repairs to the structural towers themselves," Wellman said. "The other recommendations they made were completed."

The tops of the towers were fixed back then, Wellman said, though the City didn't replace the bridge towers because they were estimated to retain about 50 percent of their capacity.

Please see BRIDGE, Page 9A

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CONTENTS

Calendar.....11B
Channel Guide.....6B
Classified ads.....8B
Obituaries.....2A
Opinion.....4A
Public Safety.....5A
Sports.....1B



1 Dollar