



Independence City Councilor Nancy Lodge attaches a boutonniere to Monmouth Mayor John Oberst on Jan. 13.

Mayors take a moment to shine

Past improvements, upcoming projects spotlighted at State of the Cities

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

MONMOUTH — The mayors of Monmouth and Independence gave updates on what the two cities have accomplished in 2015 and a little bit of what city projects are in the works for 2016 at the annual State of the Cities address on Jan. 13 at Western Oregon University.

About 50 people gathered in the Pacific Room of the Werner University Center to hear mayors John Oberst and John McArdle speak.

Oberst spoke about the projects completed in the last nine years and touched on a few future projects, namely the completion of the Main Street Park amphitheater and the relocation of Monmouth Power

and Light.

He spent some time talking about Monmouth being a bicycle friendly city, emphasizing the need for more safety education for both bicyclists and drivers.

Oberst mentioned the city budget and the pre-budget meeting held on Jan. 12, but did not mention the city's efforts to cut \$100,000 because of future increases to the Oregon Public Employee Retirement Services funds (see related story on Page 2A).

McArdle detailed new construction and future construction projects, especially

Riverplace Apartments and the developments at the old Valley Concrete site. He also unveiled the new IndyWorks app, which allows citizens to communicate issues to city workers quickly.

McArdle touted the importance of Monmouth Independence Networks (Minet), and how that has given Independence an edge in attracting companies such as FCR, a call center located by Roth's Fresh Market that employs 200 people. The center opened in 2015.

Oberst also talked about the importance of Minet, calling it as vital to city sys-

tems as water, sewer and roads.

Neither mayor discussed the roughly \$25 million in debt the cities took out jointly to build the system, which has yet to be able to consistently pay those bills. Minet management has stated repeatedly that the company is stable, able to pay its operating costs and expenses, but has not been able to pay the millions of dollars owed by the cities on its behalf.

Citizens attending asked questions about where to find more information on how to get involved in city programs or how to know about events going on, particularly for visitors.

For more information or to view the video coverage: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xvh4m45OwGc.

Monmouth looks to find \$100K savings

City will cut costs, increase revenue

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

MONMOUTH — The city of Monmouth's budget committee asked city officials to find ways to save \$100,000 in the 2016-17 budget.

The move came after hearing that costs are forecast to increase by about \$100,000 in the fiscal year 2017-18, mostly because of PERS.

"You could pay for that now, or you could wait another year," City Manager Scott McClure said.

He said the budget committee could decide to keep the budget as is, or start saving now for the expected hit next year.

"It's getting tighter," City Manager Scott McClure said about the budget. "We need to pay attention. Reserves are getting low, but it's not an emergency yet."

Making cuts in the city's budget won't be easy, McClure said, as the city already runs lean. However, a longstanding practice of budgeting with less than expected revenue has given the city a small cushion.

For example, city managers would plan their budget at 93 percent of the expected income, Finance Director Mark Dumire said.

"The budget is telling you you're in a crisis, but the actuals say not really," Dumire said.

McClure and Dumire asked the budget committee if the city should continue that practice, which had built up a 40 percent reserve at one point.

Mayor John Oberst said that when he was elected, he, the council and budget committee decided to start spending that re-



serve, making improvements in the city and parks, such as the downtown beautification, the splash fountain in Main Street Park, Madrona Park improvements and the Main Street Park amphitheater project.

"Even with that, you have low-balled income and high-balled expenses," Oberst said. "We're hitting that point where we need to make adjustments in our spending to stop catching up."

In all, the budget committee asked managers to look at raising internal franchise fees and payment in lieu of taxes.

Franchise fees are payments made by utility companies — and city-owned utilities — for use of the public rights-of-way. The money is spent in the general fund. Payment in lieu of taxes is a payment made by a tax-exempt property to help support city functions.

McClure said increases in franchise fees for sewer and power would likely not cause immediate increases in rates for Monmouth customers; however, the water fund does not have as large a reserve as sewer and power, therefore customers would likely see a water rate increase with higher franchise fees.

Dumire did not report current franchise fees before deadline.

HOME COMFORT INC *Keeping Our Customers Comfortable Since 1954*
HEATING & AIR CONDITIONING

It lowers energy bills. It raises the bar.



GET UP TO A

\$1,600

REBATE on a new Lennox® system.

Offer expires 02/12/16. See dealer for details.

24 Emergency
HOUR Service

Dave Lennox
PREMIER DEALER
LENNOX

1827 S. Main • Dallas
503.623.2341
[WWW.HOMECOMFORTINC.COM](http://www.homecomfortinc.com)

Newspaper use #102

And you thought our only use was bringing you the local news and advertisements.

Delivered every week!

Itemizer-Observer
 503-623-2373 • www.polkio.com

