

County invests in fair

Commissioners approve new caretaker home

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

RICKREALL — The Polk County Board of Commissioners approved transferring \$150,000 to the Polk County Fairgrounds & Event Center to purchase a new caretaker's home and backup generator.

The caretaker's home is a 30-year-old manufactured structure that is quickly aging past its prime said Tina Andersen, fair manager.

Andersen said the windows leak; it needs a roof, and has dry rot in several places. Rather than invest more money in the old structure, the board approved \$75,000 to replace it. Andersen said the fairgrounds caretaker is on duty all hours and attends to after-hours and weekend events, making sure people can get

into the buildings and clean up when they leave.

"We would lose a lot of revenue without him here after hours and on weekends," Andersen said.

The caretaker is paid minimum wage. Providing a home and utilities is part of his compensation.

"The bottom line is we need that person," Commissioner Craig Pope said. "We need them to be comfortable, happy and taken care of because we are not paying them any significant amount, so that is part of the pay."

The board approved an additional \$75,000 to buy a generator for the fairgrounds, which is designated as an emergency shelter by the American Red Cross.

Andersen said the fairgrounds housed and fed people during the flooding in 1996, and is the emer-

gency evacuation center for some school districts in Polk County.

"If the power were to go out, we wouldn't be able to provide that service for our community," she said.

County Administrator Greg Hansen said the \$150,000 would be transferred from the county's general fund contingency. That is in addition to \$75,000 already transferred to the fairgrounds as part of the adopted 2016-17 budget.

The request was approved unanimously.

"I see the fairgrounds property, irrespective of the actual annual fair, as a commercial property and an infrastructure asset that I, as an elected official, have a responsibility to maintain," Pope said. "It has been prioritized very low over the years."

Indy council fills positions

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

INDEPENDENCE — The Independence City Council took care of business at its Jan. 10 meeting in spite of fresh snow, but postponed the discussion on a new city branding initiative because the consultants worked out of Portland, which was hit worse than the Willamette Valley with ice and snow.

Marilyn Morton was elected council president.

Each councilor chose a committee or board to sit on as council liaison. Councilor Ken Day was appointed to the Monmouth Independence Networks board of directors.

"He's well prepared," said Morton, who works for Minet.

Day is on the finance committee for Minet.

Richard King, who was elected in November to serve on the council, did not accept his position because

of family issues, Mayor John McArdle said. The council had two options to fill the vacancy: Appoint

Michael Hicks, who ran for council and was in the audience on Jan. 10, or go through an application process.

Morton and Day wanted to open it up to an application process, while Tom Takacs, Kathy Martin-Willis



and Diana Lindskog wanted to appoint Hicks.

"I move that we appoint Mike Hicks," Takacs said. "I spoke to him earlier. He's a



Day

pretty reasonable guy. He took the time to go through the election process." "I appreciate that, but I know we've had an empty council seat for six months, and I don't think it's going to make a difference to the democratic process," Morton said, referring to Councilor Jerry Hoffman being excused from council meetings for the last part of 2016 because of illness.

Day said that while Hicks might make a great candidate, "I think there are other people also who might want the job."

Hicks ran against Day for Position 5 and garnered 760 votes, coming in second of the three candidates for that seat. Day won the position with 1,207 votes.

The vacant position counted as a "no" vote, city recorder Karin Johnson said,

so McArdle broke the tie vote and Hicks was sworn in on Jan. 10 as Independence's sixth councilor.

As Hicks took his seat at the dais, Morton said, "It's not based on the person; it's based on the process."

In other business: The council adopted a voter-approved 3 percent sales tax on recreational marijuana and repealed a 10 percent sales tax on the drug. The 10 percent sales tax was passed in October 2014 in anticipation of voters passing Measure 91 — legalizing recreational marijuana in Oregon.

Under Measure 91, cities would not be able to tax the drug, but the city council passed the 10 percent sales tax in hopes that Independence would be "grandfathered in." That is, because Independence had a sales tax on the books prior to the legalization of the drug, it would be allowed.

"It was our shot at getting some good money," City Manager David Clyne said.

The state would not allow it, but did allow cities to ask voters to approve an up-to 3 percent sales tax, which Independence did in November 2016.

The council heard progress on the information technology department, headed by Jason Kistler, Clyne's son-in-law.

"We created an official IT department, and one way we hoped to support that activity was to contract out services," Clyne said. "Monmouth contracts with us. Jason goes out to Aumsville and gives them support. So that's one of the things we do. It helps us with our reputation and is part of our branding, and gives us a chance to recover those costs."



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