

# Community

## DOWNTOWN

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During Wednesday's meeting the five-member committee talked about the 16 vacant properties and how some of them could be used.

Nudd presented the committee with copies of ordinances from Florence and Silverton. The Florence ordinance requires building owners to maintain certain standards with storefronts, whether there is an operating business or not. The Silverton ordinance prohibits building owners from boarding up windows and doors, among other things unless they're being renovated.

Nudd also gave the Baker City Downtown committee recommendations from the Center for Community Progress, a national nonprofit that tries to find uses for vacant buildings.

One of its recommendations is to require owners of all vacant buildings to register their property with the city.

During the City Council's Jan. 8 meeting, newly elected Councilor Ken Gross suggested the city consider imposing a tax on Main Street buildings, but exempting from the tax any business open at least 30 hours per week. Ten of the 16 vacant downtown properties are on Main Street.

Warner said the Council could consider such a tax, but he suggested the city avoid penalizing people who are struggling financially.

For more than 20 years the city raised money for downtown promotions through an Economic Improvement District. It assessed a tax on properties as well as an annual business license fee within or near the historic district.

The tax and license fee raised about \$42,000 per year, much of which went to Historic Baker City Inc.

But in 2013, the year the Economic Improvement District expired, owners of property totaling more than 33 percent of the total property value in the District voted against continuing the tax (34.74 percent) for another five



S. John Collins / Baker City Herald

Baker City officials are hoping to buy the parcel at 1840 Resort St., which includes this historic home and an adjacent parking lot that could be used by visitors to the city's Central Park.

years.

The City Council declined to continue assessing the business license fee, although business owner objections, which totaled 18 percent, didn't reach the 33-percent threshold that canceled the fee, as was the case with the property tax assessment.

Nudd said city officials need to look at incentives for building owners, as well as potential penalties, when trying to address the vacancy issue.

Officials also need to determine what constitutes a "vacant" building.

Empty storefronts can have more than a visual effect.

During Veterans Day weekend Baker City Gold and Silver, 1812 Main St., was targeted by a burglar who broke into the adjacent vacant building, then entered the business through a shared wall.

The burglar, who has not been caught, took items worth more than \$15,000, owner Garry McLin said.

The buildings on each side of the business are empty.

McLin believes the property from which the burglar entered, 1820 Main St., is an eyesore. He endorses City Councilor Gross' idea about a potential tax on unused buildings.

McLin said he tried to contact the owner of his neighboring building to discuss buying it, but he didn't receive a response.

"I'm just waiting to see what is going to be done, something needs to be done," McLin said.

He also said he knows someone who's interested in renting the building.

The city is interested in buying the property at 1840 Resort St., which borders Central Park. The property includes a home, built in 1912, as well as an adjacent parking lot that could be used by park visitors.

The city doesn't have a designated parking area now for Central Park, which is between Resort Street and the Powder River, south of Washington Avenue and north of Valley Avenue.

The main access to the park is by the Leo Adler Memorial Parkway, the paved pedestrian and bicycle path that parallels the river.

The house, which is 2,250 square feet, could be used by Baker City Downtown or by the newly forming Baker Youth Activity Center, Nudd said.

The home would likely be purchased by grant money, and Nudd said she hopes the city will be able to buy it later this year. The property is listed for sale online at LoopNet.com by owner Greg Sackos for \$650,000.

At least two of the other vacant properties downtown are also listed for sale online.

One building, at 1780 Main St., is owned by the Baker School District and is the former site of the Record-Courier newspaper.

The school district's brownfields program has been working on cleaning up the property and has received interest from at least two separate parties.

## LOCAL BRIEFING

### Cattlemen's Workshop Saturday

LA GRANDE — The 15th-annual Cattlemen's Workshop Northwest is set for Saturday, Jan. 19 at the Blue Mountain Conference Center, 404 12th St. in La Grande.

The event is free, and lunch is included.

The schedule:

- 8:45 a.m., welcome and overview
- 9 a.m. to 9:55 a.m., "Export Markets and National Beef Traceability Programs" presented by Kent Baucaus National Cattlemen's Beef Association
- 9:55 a.m. to 10:50 a.m., "Practicality and Implementation of Beef Traceability Programs" presented by Heather Donley, Beef Marketing Group
- 10:50 a.m. to 11:20 a.m., morning break
- 11:20 a.m. to 12:15 p.m., "Value of Stockmanship and Low-Stress Systems in Beef Production" presented by veterinarian Tom Noffsinger
- 12:15 p.m. to 1:30 p.m., lunch
- 1:30 p.m. to 2:25 p.m., "Retailer and Consumer Perspectives of Traceability Programs" presented by Wayne Morgan, Golden State Foods
- 2:25 p.m. to 3:20 p.m., "Economic Outlook and Impacts on Beef Marketing Systems" presented by Katelyn McCulloch, Livestock Marketing Information Center

### Auditions for 'Puss in Boots' Jan. 22

Eastern Oregon Regional Theatre will hold auditions for the play "Puss in Boots" at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 22.

Director Lisa Ensworth is looking for 10 young actors for this youth production. Here's the story line: When young Guy discovers that his inheritance consists only of a cat and a pair of boots, he is highly distressed, until he gets to know the cat. Saucy and one-of-a-kind, Boots the cat vows to help Guy achieve his goal of marrying the beautiful princess from next door. Boots also helps free the town from the clutches of Ugolin, an evil ogre. Guy and Boots trick the king and queen into thinking Guy is the "Marquis of Carabas" and also trick the ogre into turning himself into an insect who meets an abrupt end, courtesy of Boot's boot. Boy gets girl, the town is freed, magical spells are broken, and much fun is had along the way. Show dates are Feb. 21-24.

### Parks & Rec board meeting Jan. 22

Baker City's Parks and Recreation Board will meet Jan. 22 at 5:15 p.m. at City Hall, 1655 First St.

Agenda items include updating the community survey for the city's parks master plan, and a design for a sign at Central Park.

### Farmers Market annual meeting Jan. 22

The annual membership meeting for the Baker City Farmers Market is set for Jan. 22 at 6 p.m. at the Baker County Library, 2400 Resort St.

—Compiled from staff reports and press releases. To contribute, email information to [news@bakercityherald.com](mailto:news@bakercityherald.com)

## COUNTY

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An existing state law — ORS 354.690 — requires residents who use the District's TV signals to pay the annual \$100 fee.

And some Haines and Baker City residents do so voluntarily, McHaddad said.

But because neither city was annexed, the District's options for collecting fees from residents who use the signals but don't pay are much more limited because the property tax assessment isn't an option, McHaddad said.

"Our revenue system is a bit quirky," he said.

McHaddad said the District's visual survey of Haines showed that a majority of homes there have a TV antenna. He also surveyed a small section of Baker County and saw 27 antennas, 16 of which were at properties whose owners pay the District's fee, or have in the past.

The presence of an antenna is not proof that the resident is using the District's signals, but it does give the District a reason to mail a letter to the property owner reminding them of the legal obligation to pay the fee if they use the signals, McHaddad said.

He told county commissioners that the Haines City Council is supporting both bills, and he has also made a presentation to the Baker City Council.

The three commissioners didn't actually vote on the matter Wednesday, but all three — Chairman Bill Harvey and Commissioners Bruce Nichols and Mark Bennett — agreed to support the bill so long as neither is drastically changed as it moves through the legislative process.

The other bill, Senate Bill 394, would allow the District to transmit local emergency alerts, start a local news channel, generate revenue

through selling advertisement, and "distribute video-on-demand content."

McHaddad said he also is promoting a legislative concept — it has not been introduced as a bill — that would allow the District to ask cities to have code enforcement officers inspect properties for antennas, and also to collect the annual fee through city utility bills.

McHaddad said he doesn't expect a bill with that change will be introduced during the 2019 legislative session.

### Baker Heritage Museum floors

The Baker County Heritage Museum, which is still searching for a new director, has received a \$15,000 grant from the Leo Adler Foundation to install new vinyl flooring to replace carpeting in two parts of the Museum at 2480 Grove St.

The first priority is the balcony, with the second priority the gift shop area.

On Wednesday, commissioners approved the purchase of flooring from Home Depot in Ontario for \$9,673. Crews from the Powder River Correctional Facility will remove the carpeting, and a local installer will lay the new flooring — about 300 square feet in the balcony area, and 900 square feet in the gift shop. The work is expected to be finished by the end of February.

### Fee schedule

Commissioners approved a new fee schedule following a second public hearing on the topic. The schedule includes a new fee of \$525 for complex land use projects that require a conditional use permit. The fee for a regular conditional use permit project is \$250.

The \$525 fee for complex

projects would be imposed on applications that require the county to spend much more staff time than a typical project requires. A complex project will also require the applicant enter into an agreement to compensate the county for any extraneous costs, which could be in addition to the \$525 fee.

Planning Director Holly Kerns will determine what constitutes a complex project. Kerns estimates that the county receives one such application every two years.

### Other business

Also on Wednesday commissioners approved:

- A map of the Unity and Burnt River Fire and EMS coverage.
- \$25,276 to rebuild the engine in the Road Department's fifth-wheel truck.
- Purchase of a new crane truck for \$25,000 for the Road Department from Oregon State Surplus
- Purchase of a new air conditioner, for \$5,854, that

will be used by the Sheriff's Office. The air conditioner will cool the area which houses radio equipment, the jail phone system and jail video monitoring equipment.

- Purchase of a 2019 Jeep Compass from the Baker City Auto Ranch for \$23,001. The vehicle will be used by the Assessor's Office.

- The appointment of Kivell Walker, Elisa Hiatt and Blain Stritmater to the Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Advisory Committee for terms expiring Feb. 1, 2022.

- The appointment of Aubreyanna Henshaw to the Mental Health & Developmentally Disabled Advisory Committee for a term expiring Nov. 1, 2022.
- The re-appointment of Rebecca Kolbet to the Museum Commission for a term expiring Jan. 1, 2022.

- The appointment of Baker City Councilor Doni Bruland to the Northeast Oregon Economic Development District for a term expiring Dec. 31, 2019.

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CenturyLink participates in a government benefit program (Lifeline) to make residential telephone or broadband service more affordable to eligible low-income individuals and families. Eligible customers are those that meet eligibility standards as defined by the FCC and state commissions. Residents who live on federally recognized Tribal Lands may qualify for additional Tribal benefits if they participate in certain additional federal eligibility programs. The Lifeline discount is available for only one telephone or qualifying broadband service per household, which can be either a wireline or wireless service. Broadband speeds must be 18 Mbps download and 2 Mbps upload or faster to qualify.

A household is defined for the purposes of the Lifeline program as any individual or group of individuals who live together at the same address and share income and expenses. Lifeline service is not transferable, and only eligible consumers may enroll in the program. Consumers who willfully make false statements in order to obtain Lifeline telephone or broadband service can be punished by fine or imprisonment and can be barred from the program.

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