

COUNCIL

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Councilor Lynette Perry, who said during the Council's Oct. 13 meeting that the proposed policy "terrifies" her, said Tuesday that she believes it should be called the Baker City Excessive Force and Civil Rights Demonstration Policy "because it is covering both of those."

"We got a little lost in it being called 'excessive force' which really was not as much the issue as the demonstration portion as far as I was concerned," Perry said.

The proposed policy reads:

"It is the policy of the City of Baker City that:

1. Its law enforcement personnel shall not use excessive force against any individuals engaged in nonviolent civil rights demonstrations, and

2. Applicable state and local laws that prohibit physically barring entrance to or exit from a facility or location which is the subject of such nonviolent civil rights demonstrations within its jurisdiction shall be enforced."

Councilor Doni Bruland, who also has objected to the language in the proposed policy, said she wants the city to help New Directions Northwest acquire the federal grant to build the fitness center for its clients in mental health and addiction treatment. The facility wouldn't be open to the general public.

"I think the center is needed and I appreciate, honestly, the work you did and the people that can use it," Bruland said. "It still comes down to us as a group, as a governing body, being forced to sign something that we already have in existence."

Bruland compared the block grant requirement to blackmail, with the federal government enticing the city with money.

She reiterated her belief that the Baker City Police's existing 8-page use of force policy already covers the issues listed in the proposed policy.

"You're asking an entire community to sign on to a redundant policy to get money for a few," Bruland said. "And it's that blackmail that I'm against. It's the idea that we are being forced to sign something that we already have as a law, not just a policy."

"This is opening a huge can of worms and setting a precedent that we'll take your money and agree to

"You're asking an entire community to sign on to a redundant policy to get money for a few."

— City Councilor Doni Bruland

whatever you want to tell us to say' and that's not right," Bruland said.

Perry agreed with Bruland.

"I'm in total awe that you got the grant and what you want to do, it's a wonderful project. My objection is the wording," Perry said.

Mayor Loran Joseph, who has urged his fellow councilors to approve the policy and secure the grant for New Directions, said Tuesday that elected officials in more than 15,000 other communities nationwide have adopted the policy since 1990.

Perry said she would support adopting a policy if the wording was changed.

"If we could have something that reflects what we have in place (as a use of force policy) and state it for their approval that this is what we have in place, that would be wonderful. But for them to say you have to have it in these words, that doesn't really define what we're signing off on, is where I object," said Perry.

Councilor Larry Morrison was absent Tuesday, and councilors did not take any action.

A motion to table the matter failed by a 3-3 vote, with Perry, Bruland and Arvid Andersen voting yes on the motion, and Joseph, Jason Spriet and Randy Schiewe voting no.

Several residents attended the meeting to comment about the controversy over the proposed policy.

Ethan Wolston, a member of the Baker Community Justice Project, endorsed the policy and grant.

"Our group seeks to make Baker City a more open, welcoming, and just community for all people," Wolston said. "We value respect, human dignity, and inclusive values. We resist racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination."

He said the group's support of the grant for New Directions is driven by a desire to include and provide opportunity to all members of the community.

"In building their wellness center, New Directions will provide opportunities to traditionally underserved populations here in Baker City," Wolston said.

Troy Lepley of Baker City objected to the proposed policy.

"People I've talked to across the board, the concern is the way this has come about," Lepley said. "This has come about through a grant, through money, that is requiring us to enact a policy that has absolutely nothing to do with the grant itself. And I'm also concerned about, does that mean any policy? If someone could wave enough money in front of us, we'll enact whatever?"

New Directions CEO Shari Selander asked councilors to consider "what is the cost to our community if we don't approve adopting the policy."

"Loss for economic development, loss of being able to have a positive impact for our at-risk youth and adults, the vulnerable population here in Baker," Selander said. "It makes a difference for the 17-year-old suicidal young man that we continually deal with. It makes a difference for the adolescent girls that are cutting and struggling with inner pain."

Selander said traditional therapy doesn't work for everyone, and the fitness center would allow people in treatment to spend time with friends.

"It makes a difference in their lives and that's what I see every day, that's what my staff sees," Selander said.

She reminded councilors that Baker City Police Chief Ray Duman is not opposed to the city adopting the proposed policy. Duman told councilors Oct. 13 that he doesn't believe the policy would affect how officers do their jobs.

Shad Thomas, additions program director for New Directions, told councilors that about 37% of Baker County's population qualifies for Medicaid and would be eligible to use the proposed fitness center.

"Additionally, that population of 37% has a huge impact on everyone else," Thomas said. "You take into account mental health, substance abuse issues, these are kids and families that are growing up that your children and your grandchildren are going to be involved with. They are people that are going to be owning businesses in the next 10, 15, 20 years. What type of community are we trying to build and support to leave our children?"

Thomas said there is no effective medications to treat methamphetamine abuse, saying the best treatment is exercise.

"It increases the probability that they will remain sober, it also decreases their withdrawal symptoms," Thomas said.



Wallowa-Whitman National Forest / Contributed Photo

A fire on Tuesday night damaged the historic Peavy Cabin in the Elkhorn Mountains.

CABIN

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The cabin, along the North Fork of the John Day River between Anthony Lakes and Granite, was built in 1934 by George Wilcox Peavy, then dean of the School of Forestry at Oregon State University. A Forest Service employee, Larry Bilyeu, restored the cabin in the early 1990s.

The Forest Service makes the cabin available for rent through a contract administered by Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort.

"While the fire at Peavy Cabin was an unfortunate incident, it was also a shining example of cooperation and shared stewardship," said Kendall Cikanek, Whitman District Ranger. "Everyone is safe, and the cabin is still standing, and that is thanks to a coordinated response from the hunters staying at the cabin, the North Powder Rural Fire Protection District, and Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort."

The fire started when heat

escaped from the fireplace chimney, setting fire to a wall and the cabin's ceiling, according to Cikanek.

Flames burned a section of logs on the outside of the cabin in one area.

The hunters spent much of the night pouring water on the fire, Cikanek said.

North Powder Rural Fire Protection District and Wallowa-Whitman National Forest fire staff arrived early Wednesday and confirmed that there was no heat left, he said.

Jay Moore, recreation specialist for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, said: "Clearly, the cabin will need to be repaired, although we are relieved to see that it remains sealed from the winter weather. We will also explore alternatives to firewood heat to reduce the risk of a future fire."

Peavy Cabin was slated to close for the season on Oct. 31 regardless.

The Whitman District's goal is to have it ready for rental by May 1, 2021.

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