

# Quiet

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The City Council most recently discussed the quiet zone issue in October 2021, when it was still a six-member group.

During the Oct. 12 meeting, councilors deadlocked twice on 3-3 votes.

The first motion was to put the quiet zone matter on the May 2022 primary election ballot, letting city voters decide whether the city should pursue the designation. Mayor Kerry McQuisten and Councilors Johnny Waggoner Sr. and Joanna Dixon voted in favor.

Councilors Shane Alderson, Jason Spriet and Heather Sells voted against the motion.

The second motion was similar to what Guyer proposed on Tuesday, Jan. 25 — to have the city make a formal application with the Federal Railroad Administration for a quiet zone designation.

The vote on the motion was divided the same way. This time the trio of Alderson, Spriet and Sells was in favor, and the three-some of McQuisten, Waggoner and Dixon was opposed.

Peter Fargo, a Baker City resident who has been promoting the quiet zone for about three years, wrote in an email to the Herald, in response to the Council's vote:

"The railroad quiet zone will improve the safety of our kids and community. On Tuesday night, the City Council affirmed that safety comes first. We are grateful for their decision and look forward to sharing more information about how Baker City's quiet zone will benefit everyone's safety, health, and/or economic opportunity."

In a letter he sent to councilors prior to the meeting, Fargo

wrote that, based on comments he and other promoters have heard from residents over the past three years, he believes train whistles "are a relentless insult to their quality of life, sleep, and health ... and/or the horns impact their kids at South Baker School."

## Cost questions and citizen opposition

Dixon, who opposes the quiet zone, cited costs.

"We've got issues with the staffing on our police department, we've got issues on our fire department, public works, there are other areas that our funds need to be going to," Dixon said.

However, a citizens group has offered to raise the estimated \$150,000 to upgrade five crossings in the city to make it more difficult for vehicles to reach the tracks when a train is passing.

The proposal from Guyer that passed by the 4-3 vote on Tuesday states that the city would install those safety measures "when sufficient external funds are available to improve each crossing."

The proposal states that city administrators can "spend the time necessary to support the Quiet Zone as part of their City work, understanding that their time is already budgeted and need not draw on externally raised funds."

Sells, who voted in favor of the quiet zone plan, said that based on information the citizens group has provided, and the experience of other cities, including La Grande, she's convinced that the quiet zone would benefit Baker City.

"I personally felt like this

needed to be on the ballot in the very beginning as well," Sells said. "I stated this in the last discussion. As I learned more about the group who is putting the funds together, I don't feel that that needs to be on a ballot because it's no taxpayer dollars. If there was taxpayer money, absolutely, that's something everyone needs to have a voice in."

Dixon countered that she was elected to represent all city residents, not just what she called special interests. She advocated for letting voters

decide whether to pursue a quiet zone.

McQuisten, citing Facebook polls she has done as well as personal conversations, said 85% of the respondents are urging her to oppose a quiet zone.

She said 416 people who responded to the polls oppose a quiet zone, while 44 supported it so long as there are no costs to the city.

"I presented these numbers last time and they were ignored mostly by council because of where they came from — personal contact one-on-one with me or Facebook polls, which are completely valid," McQuisten said.

She said she believes councilors can't ignore such input from citizens even if people with a different viewpoint are passionate in supporting the quiet zone.

"I'm not for or against, honestly," McQuisten said. "I will support the will of the people and if we put this on the ballot and the majority say 'yeah, we want a quiet zone,' OK, let's roll with it. So far I'm not getting that. That's why I'm against pushing this through."

Alderson, who voted in favor of the quiet zone, said when he goes to look at the social media polls, he cannot find them but instead reads comments arguing back and forth, including some calling him and Guyer liars and accusing them of taking bribes.

"When I ran, I promised that I would give fair and equal voice to anybody that would come talk to me and if you want to come and talk to me, I will always be willing to," Alderson said. "The quiet zone (supporters) were willing to come talk to me and I heard them out."

Alderson said 51 businesses have signed a letter asking the city to pursue a quiet zone. He said he received more than 60 emails in the past week, and more of those are from people who support the quiet zone.

"The people who are in opposition of this, need to come forward with as much effort and enthusiasm, not a day late and a dollar short, to do what you are proposing to do," Alderson said. "You've had since 2019 to ask that this be put on the ballot."

Although the citizens group has volunteered to raise money for the crossing upgrades, residents have raised the question of ongoing maintenance.

Common improvements needed to qualify for a quiet zone include building concrete medians that block vehicles from reaching the railroad tracks when a train is passing and the crossing arms are down.

Spriet, who voted in favor of pursuing a quiet zone, asked Michelle Owen, the city's public works director, about long-term maintenance costs.

Owen said the most common maintenance task could be replacing reflectors on arms and other items at crossings.

"I would guess \$500 a year to maintain those," Owen said.



McQuisten



Alderson

# Watershed

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In the late 1990s the Wallowa-Whitman spent more than \$2.2 million to cut trees and light prescribed fires to create fuelbreaks on the fringes of the watershed. Most of the work was on the south end and along the road under which is buried the city's water pipeline, with a goal of giving fire crews a place to head off a blaze moving toward the watershed.

The project the Wallowa-Whitman is working on now would expand on those efforts, Cikanek said.

He hopes to distribute to the public what's known as a "scoping letter" by the end of February.

That letter in effect introduces the watershed project and gives its basic outline.

Cikanek said the field studies for the project have been done, and the next major step for the Wallowa-Whitman is to write an environmental assessment, a document that examines the project in detail and studies its potential environmental effects.

A 1969 federal law, the National Environmental Policy Act, requires federal agencies to conduct such environmental studies.

Cikanek said his goal is to finish the environmental assessment for the watershed project in early 2023. Once Wallowa-Whitman officials have approved that, work could get started, barring legal challenges.

## Work outside the watershed, and inside

The project calls for some type of work, whether cutting trees or prescribed burning, on about 22,600 acres.

Most of the commercial logging would happen outside the watershed, on its fringes on the south and east sides, including below the pipeline road, which forms the eastern boundary of the watershed, Cikanek said. The other major tactic is lighting prescribed fires to reduce fuel loads on the ground. This includes areas that were thinned and burned about 20 years ago — what's known as "maintenance" work, Cikanek said.

"What we're trying to do is create defensible zones between likely sources of ignition and the watershed itself," he said in a 2021 interview.

Although lightning has sparked several fires inside the watershed over the past 25 years or so, firefighters have quickly doused all of those blazes.

In August 2019 lightning from a single storm started three fires in the watershed, the largest of which burned about 3 acres.

That's in part because smoke wafting out of the watershed is readily visible from most of Baker Valley, and in part because fire crews can reach the area relatively quickly, Cikanek said.

"Detection up there is pretty good," he said. He said the Wallowa-Whitman strives to have a heavy helicopter stationed at either the Baker City or La Grande airport when the fire danger is high. A helicopter from Baker City potentially can be dropping water on a fire in the watershed less than 10 minutes after taking off.

Although the fuel load is high in parts of the watershed — a function of the many decades that have passed since the last major blaze — Cikanek said he worries more about a fire starting outside the watershed and then pushing into the 10,000-acre area.

"A fire moving into the watershed likely is going to carry more energy," he said, compared with, say, a lightning bolt that starts a blaze high in the watershed, where the forest is more sparse and interspersed with rocky outcrops and alpine meadows.

That said, the risk of a fire starting inside the watershed and growing rapidly absolutely exists, Cikanek said.

To deal with that danger, the project also proposes work inside the watershed. The focus, he said, would be on creating fuelbreaks on ridgelines between the major streams such as Salmon, Marble and Mill creeks. The idea is to thin the forest and light prescribed fires late in the season when the risk of fire is "basically zero."

The one area where more intensive thinning, including commercial logging, could happen is along the Marble Creek Pass road, since that area, unlike most of the rest of the watershed, is accessible to motor vehicles.

The overriding goal of work inside the watershed, Cikanek said, is to create a series of interconnected fuelbreaks where firefighters could potentially stop a blaze and minimize the number of streams or springs that the city might have to temporarily stop using for drinking water in the case of a blaze.

"The way I look at it is trying to give firefighters the safest chance to be successful," he said.

## Improvements to Marble Creek Pass Road

Creating a more significant fuelbreak in the Marble Creek corridor requires commercial logging, and that means log trucks.

But the Marble Creek Pass road, which more resembles a stream bed in places, is far from suitable as a

## Limestone Led To Road

The Marble Creek Pass road was built as a haul route for trucks carrying limestone from a quarry at Baboon Creek, on the west (Sumpter) side of the pass, to a lime-processing plant in Baker Valley near the intersection of Wingville Road and Highway 30, about five miles north of Baker City. There were two such quarries, the other being on the Baker side of the Elkhorns, along Marble Creek, hence the name of the pass.

The two quarries, owned by the Chemical Lime Co., produced an estimated \$8 million in chemical-grade lime between 1957 and 1971, according to a 1989 report, "Limestone Deposits in Oregon," from the Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries. The Marble Creek quarry was the first to be mined. It closed in 1963 in part because the limestone deposit was cut by a different type of rock. Chemical Lime then opened the Baboon Creek quarry, which operated from 1963 until 1971, when both the quarry and the processing plant closed. Lower-grade lime from the processing plant is still piled at the site; the bright-white mounds are conspicuous even from the top of Elkhorn Peak, more than 5,500 feet above.

Both quarries tapped deposits of limestone formed from the remains of billions of shellfish that hardened into calcium carbonate at the bottom of a tropical sea about 250 million years ago. The deposits are the biggest in the Elkhorns but only of moderate size for Northeastern Oregon. There are massive outcroppings of limestone in parts of the Wallowa Mountains, including the imposing west face of the Matterhorn, and along the Burnt River, where Ash Grove Cement Co. mines limestone to produce portland cement near Durkee.

The name "Marble" for the creek and the pass refer to the metamorphic form of limestone. Marble is created when limestone, a sedimentary rock, is subject to heat or pressure, or sometimes both, over millions of years. Some of the rock in the Marble Creek area isn't a true marble, but rather a sort of intermediate stage between limestone and marble.

Mike Upmeyer of Baker City, who died in 2010, told the Herald in 1995 that he drove limestone-laden trucks over the pass in 1970 and 1971. "We just locked up the trailer and let it slide," he said, referring to places where the grade reaches 15 percent, more than twice as steep as Ladd Canyon on Interstate 84. One driver was killed in October 1968 when his truck plunged off the road.

log-hauling route, Cikanek said. The road is accessible to high-clearance four-wheel drive vehicles and ATVs.

The condition of the road prompted the Wallowa-Whitman to apply for almost \$1.3 million in For-



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Sunday, January 30, 2022 ~ 12:00 p.m.

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Baker City Public Works/Contributed Photo

One of the intakes in the Baker City watershed where water is diverted into the city's supply pipeline.

est Service capital improvement money to rebuild about 6 miles of the road, creating a 21-foot-wide route with a fresh layer of gravel.

Cikanek said the Wallowa-Whitman will receive the money for road improvements once it approves the watershed project.

Besides making it feasible to haul logs from the Marble Creek corridor, the road project will make it easier for hikers, mountain bikers and other recreationists to reach

Marble Creek Pass from the east (Baker Valley) side of the Elkhorns.

(The road continues west into Sumpter Valley, but that section, which is steep and rough but in somewhat better shape, isn't slated for improvements.)

Marble Creek Pass, elevation 7,542 feet, is the southern trailhead for the Elkhorn Crest National Recreation Trail, the 23-mile route that follows the Elkhorns north to Anthony Lakes.

## Dwight E. Brooks

October 25, 1929 - January 17, 2022

Dwight Brooks, 92, of Union, Oregon, died Monday, Jan. 17, 2022, in the comfort of his home. Friends are invited to join the family for a graveside service at the Union Cemetery at 11 a.m. on Friday, Jan. 28, 2022.

Dwight Elbert Brooks was born on Oct. 25, 1929, in Halfway, Oregon. He was raised and educated in Richland, graduating from Eagle Valley High School in 1947. He married schoolmate Lorraine Thompson of Richland and together they had three children.

Dwight met Donna Van Housen while working at Ronde Valley Lumber Company. They were married in Union, Oregon, at Donna's folks' house on March 10, 1967.

Dwight spent his career working in the lumber industry. He worked at the Melvin Hess Sawmill in Richland, Oregon, Louisiana Pacific Lumber in Rexburg, Idaho, and Linton Plywood in Portland, Oregon. And 27 years at Ronde Valley Lumber in Union as a head sawyer.

Dwight loved horseback riding, camping and golfing. He enjoyed the seasons of summer and fall and anything Western-themed. When asked about memorable times in his life, Dwight replied, "Raising my children and living with my wife. Donna made me happy." Dwight will be remembered for not being afraid to work, helping others and his discipline to get things done.

He was preceded in death by his daughter, Debbie Fifer; parents, Paul and Olga Brooks; brothers, Stanley and Charles Brooks; and son-in-law, Jim Collier.

Dwight is survived by his wife, Donna Brooks of 55 years; sons, Larry (Prinipa) Brooks, Bart (Karen) Mitchell and Dalton (Yulia) Brooks; daughters, Tanya Collier and significant other Gary Moe, and Sharon (Field) Paine; 20 grandchildren and 24 great-grandchildren; and his faithful cat, "The cat with no name."

For those who would like to make a memorial donation in memory of Dwight, the family suggests the Union Ambulance Service or the charity of your choice through Tami's Pine Valley Funeral Home and Cremation Services, PO Box 543, Halfway, OR 97834. Online condolences can be shared at www.tamispinevalleyfuneralhome.com.

