

Cemetery

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Owen said the contractor keeps track of removed items, organizing them by section, to make it easier for relatives or friends to retrieve and return them to the proper grave.

Eric Pierce, who owns HnT Lawn Care, said he and his crew, during the spring clean up, strive to pull out dead grass and move the larger decorations.

He said coins, which are often left on headstones, are left.

Rocks, which are sometimes left on Jewish graves, can be a problem.

“We can’t really have rocks out there. Because when they do get off the headstone, they hurt our lawnmowers,” Pierce said. “So we have to pick the rocks up.”

He said workers try to leave as many decorations as possible, and they treat all items with respect, including those that are removed and either stored or discarded.

Pierce said it’s a considerable task to care for Mount Hope with its acres of grass, along with many trees and shrubs.

“Just keeping it green,” Pierce said.

The contractor also tries to keep ground squirrel populations under control.

The job can be even more challenging during droughts, when the city reduces water use, including at the cemetery and city parks.

During summer, when the grass grows rapidly, Pierce said his crews are mowing at Mount Hope at least four times per week, and using string trimmers around gravestones five days a week.

About Mount Hope

The property has served as a cemetery since the 19th century, originally as private property but later becoming city property.

The cemetery contains more than 15,000 marked graves. A searchable database of burial records is available on the city’s website at <http://bakercity.com/2153/Cemetery>.



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald, File

Mount Hope Cemetery on Memorial Day in 2020.

The city also sells grave sites — more than 4,000 of the approximately 17,000 available spaces have been reserved.

The city charges \$451 for a standard space, and \$467 for perpetual care of the space. A standard burial costs \$805.

The city uses the money to maintain the cemetery.

The cemetery department also has two trust funds that provide much of the money to care for Mount Hope.

The larger fund, the Mount Hope Trust Fund, contains about \$500,000.

The second is the John Schmitz Memorial Fund, which contains about \$277,000. Schmitz was a Baker City businessman who left the city the money, asking that it be used only at the cemetery.

Over the years the city has used money from the Schmitz Fund for a variety of purposes, including building a paved lane in the cemetery named Schmitz Drive.

Although the city owns the cemetery, the property is split into more than a dozen sections, including the Catholic (one of the older parts of Mount Hope, with many 19th century graves), Masonic, Odd Fellows, Elks and Eagles.

The cemetery also has a special section reserved for veterans.



Contributed Photo

Tiller’s Folly is one of the bands scheduled to play at the Chautauqua Music Festival in Richland May 20-22, 2022.

Festival

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Those interested in the open mic can contact her in advance at badroadsfestival@gmail.com.

Sunday again features breakfast at the Eagle Valley Grange from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m., and vendors will be open just for the morning, from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m.

A gospel jam finishes the festival from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Tickets

Tickets are on sale at www.chautauquamusicfestival.com, or in Baker City at Ryder Bros. and the A-Frame RV Park.

Artley also has tickets at her restaurant, Sara’s Richland Cafe.

Tickets are \$17 for Friday only, and \$25 for Saturday.

An all access ticket for both days is \$35.

For children ages 6-12, tickets are \$10 for Friday only, \$15 for just Saturday, or \$20 for a weekend pass.

Lodging, sponsors

Artley said they’ve posted a list of lodging partners on the website — look under “Attendee Info.”

“We’re encouraging people to use our partners who are sponsoring us,” she said.

As for sponsors, she said organizers — who are all volunteers — welcome more businesses that would like to

support the festival, which they plan to make a yearly event.

They held a “mini Chautauqua” fundraiser earlier this spring, and are currently running a raffle to win a Ruger American. Tickets are \$10 and available at the same places as festival tickets. The winner will be drawn on May 21 at the festival.

Any profits from the festival, she said, will go back to benefit the local community.

Anyone interested in being a sponsor or making a donation can contact Artley by email at badroadsfestival@gmail.com, or send her a message through the Facebook page (Chautauqua Music Festival).

Ambulances

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The city taxpayers, City Council and the Baker City budget cannot continue in this fashion.”

Guyer, who was appointed to the City Council in December 2021, said the situation confronting the city and county is unfortunate.

He said he didn’t relish voting on March 22 to send the notice to the county.

“None of us really wants to see this happen,” Guyer said.

He said he recognizes that the situation affects not only ambulance service, but also the city’s fire department staffing.

The proposed city budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1, 2022, which the city released this week, calls for cutting the fire department staffing from the current 16.25 full-time equivalents (FTE), to 10.5. The department’s personnel costs would drop from \$2,174,000 to \$1,476,000 — a 32% decrease.

That would be necessary in part because although the city doesn’t collect all that it bills for ambulance runs — the collection rate is running about 50% this fiscal year, up from 32.7% in 2019 — the ambulance bills do bring in revenue. The amount projected for the current fiscal year is \$1,057,000. Without that revenue, the city couldn’t support as large a fire-fighting staff as it has now.

In addition, ambulance runs account for about 80% to 85% of the department’s service calls, with fires being comparatively uncommon.

The union representing city firefighters contends that the proposed cuts, which would reduce the standard shift from three firefighters on duty to two, would compromise safety both for firefighters and for the public.

Casey Johnson, the local union president, said he’s concerned that with the staff cuts, firefighters wouldn’t be able to enter burning structures in many cases because they wouldn’t have the required backup crew of at least two.

City Councilor Jason Spriet said that although he believes the city can’t afford to continue operating ambulances for the foreseeable future without finding a new, reliable source of revenue, he is intrigued by the possibility of the city keeping the ambulance service — and avoiding layoffs in the fire department — at least for the fiscal year that starts July 1.

“I’m not saying there’s not a solution,” Spriet said.

But he said he can’t support that one-year option without some certainty that during that time the city and county would work together to try to find that new revenue source, without which, Spriet believes, the city’s ambulance service is doomed.

That source would likely be some type of voter-approved tax levy or fee, and potentially, as councilors and commissioners discussed Wednesday, creating a special ambulance service district with its own tax levy.

“I’d like to keep it local,” Spriet said. “We need that service. But somebody has to pay for the service.”

He said he’s not optimistic that voters would agree to raise their property taxes to pay for ambulance services, however.

City manager, union president disagree on need for new firefighters

Spriet said the city’s setting of the Sept. 30 date for ending ambulance service, and the proposed cuts to the fire department, must have been “morale-crushing” to the department’s employees.

At least one firefighter/paramedic, Brian Johnson, told the Herald that he took another job, in Washington state, as a result.

County Commissioner Bruce Nichols said it seems clear to him that Cannon and the city councilors “want out of the ambulance service.”

Nichols said his goal is to “buy some time” by negotiating a one-year contract with the city that would have the fire department continue as the provider for the Baker ambulance service area.

The idea, Nichols said, is to keep the fire department staff intact — preserving the current fire response capability as well as its ambulance service — to give local officials time to ask voters, possibly in the May 2023 election, to approve a levy or other new revenue source.

That could potentially solve the city’s longer term financial issues in providing ambulance services — issues that Nichols acknowledges are considerable.

Cannon, though, said he’s not convinced the city can afford even the one-year extension that Nichols suggested and that Spriet also mentioned, without depleting other parts of the city’s general fund.

The reason, Cannon said, is that the fire department’s vol-

ume of ambulance calls has been rising for the past few years. And he believes that sometime later this year, the city, to maintain its current level of service, would need to hire three more firefighter/paramedics. The resulting cost — likely between \$300,000 and \$350,000 annually — would increase the city’s personnel costs as well as the gap between expenses and ambulance revenues.

The city’s number of ambulance calls rose from 1,368 in calendar year 2018 to 1,787 in calendar year 2021 — a 30.6% increase.

But Casey Johnson, president of the local firefighters’ union, disagrees. He deemed Cannon’s contention about the imminent need to hire three new workers “invalid.”

Johnson believes the fire department staffing, as budgeted for the current fiscal year, is sufficient to handle the call volume for the next fiscal year even with the rising trend.

There are, however, two factors affecting the department’s ability to deal effectively with the call volume, Johnson said.

The first is the city’s decision in July 2021 to change the schedule for the three division chiefs (previously designated as battalion chiefs) from the standard firefighter shift of 24 hours on duty and 48 hours off, to a 40-hour, weekday schedule. The division chiefs are available during those hours to respond to fires and ambulance calls, but Johnson said the schedule change shifts more of the burden to firefighters who work the 24-hour shifts.

Johnson said the union filed a grievance against the city regarding the schedule change

for the division chiefs, but that schedule remains in place.

The second factor is replacing the two vacancies in the firefighter/paramedic ranks — Brian Johnson, who left earlier this month, and a second position that’s been vacant for several months. The city has already budgeted those positions for the current fiscal year, so filling those two vacancies would not increase the city’s personnel costs beyond what it anticipated.

Johnson agrees that if call volumes continue to increase, at some point the city would need to hire three new firefighter/paramedics to avoid excessive overtime costs and risk employee burnout.

“I don’t think that’s imminent, but it is on the horizon,” Johnson said.

City budget board member’s viewpoint

Randy Daugherty, a former city councilor and a member of the city’s budget board, said on Thursday, April 21, that he believes the city can afford to continue operating ambulances for the next fiscal year based on its current staffing and budget.

Daugherty, who has previously served as chairman of the budget board, which consists of the seven city councilors and seven community members, said it’s an “unfortunate situation” and that he agrees that the city and county, the latter being legally responsible for ambulance service, need to find a new revenue source.

Daugherty said it’s clear to him that the city staff in-



Nichols



Spriet



Guyer

Darrell Scott Hobson

January 19, 1951 – December 4, 2021

Darrell was born in New Bedford, MA, the third oldest of 13 children to David and Claire Hobson. He spent his childhood growing up in Massachusetts, Colorado, and Oregon.

He met the love of his life, Anita, his wife of 50 years, at Helen M. Stack Jr. High in Baker City.

From 1969 to 1975, Darrell served in the U.S. Navy as a Hospital Corpsman. He was stationed on the USS Mississinewa for 2 years, a year at St. Albans Hospital in New York City, and 2 years in Newport, RI.

After finishing his Navy service he and Anita moved to Portland, OR, where they raised their 3 children, Saundra, Roland, and Terence.

Darrell was a Portland State University graduate and retired from the City of Portland Water Bureau after 25 years.

He loved his wife, family, sports, music, reading, helping people that are less fortunate, boating, philosophy, films, cooking, the outdoors, all types of vacationing, and getting things done. He will be dearly missed.

Celebration of Life is being held at the Milwaukie Elks on May 14th.



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