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VOTERS GUIDE A5-6
Baker County Commission
candidates

Baker City Herald

IN THIS EDITION: LOCAL • BUSINESS & AG LIFE • SPORTS Serving Baker County since 1870 • bakercityherald.com THURSDAY, APRIL 28, 2022 • \$1.50

QUICK HITS

Good Day Wish To A Subscriber
A special good day to Herald subscriber Dan Warnock of Baker City.

BRIEFING

City begins testing fire hydrants

The Baker City Public Works Department started its annual fire hydrant testing and water line flushing Monday, April 25, and the campaign will continue for about two to three weeks.

This work is done each year to flush sediment from the water system and ensure all hydrants are functioning properly and are delivering water at the correct pressure and volume.

Through this, small silt-like particles may become stirred up after settling in water lines that are less active. This can make water run cloudy temporarily. If that happens in your home or business, turn on a cold water faucet outside and let it run until the water is clear.

If you use a water filtration system, remember to clean the screen to restore full water flow.

If your water continues to be cloudy, call the city water department at 541-523-6541.

Spaghetti feed Saturday at Quail Ridge

After a two-year hiatus, the Quail Ridge Golf Course spaghetti feed returns on Saturday, April 30, at 5 p.m. Cost is \$20 per plate, or free for children 12 and younger. The evening includes an auction — all proceeds go toward course improvements.

WEATHER

Today
47/32
Rain showers



Friday
54/33
Partly sunny



Full forecast on the back of the B section.

The space below is for a postage label for issues that are mailed.

Quiet zone won't go to voters after all

BY JAYSON JACOBY AND SAMANTHA O'CONNOR
Baker City Herald

The question of whether Baker City should pursue a railroad quiet zone apparently won't go to city voters after all.

The City Council voted 4-3 on Tuesday evening, April 26, to revert to its decision made on Jan. 25 to apply with the Federal Railroad Administration for the quiet zone, in which freight trains would not sound their horns when approaching public crossings unless the engineer determined there was an emergency.

To qualify for a quiet zone, the city would have to make physical improvements to crossings. A local group has vowed to raise the estimated \$150,000 privately, with no financial contribution from the city, although the city would be responsible for maintaining any new structures.

Michelle Owen, the city's public works director, said at an earlier meeting that the estimated annual maintenance cost is about \$500.

Heather Sells, one of the four councilors who voted in favor of applying for a quiet zone, left the Council on March 1 because she was moving outside the city limits and no longer eligible to serve.



Damschen

Then, during the April 12 City Council meeting, Councilor Joanna Dixon made a motion that the city refer the quiet zone issue to voters in the Nov. 8, 2022, election. That motion passed 4-2, with Dixon, Mayor Kerry McQuisten

and Councilors Johnny Waggoner Sr. and Kenyon Damschen in favor. Councilors Jason Spriet and Shane Alderson were opposed. Councilor Dean Guyer, who voted in favor of the Jan. 25 motion, was absent April 12.

During Tuesday's meeting, Guyer suggested the Council revert to the Jan. 25 decision.

His motion passed 4-3, with Guyer, Spriet and Alderson joined by Damschen in voting yes.

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FOREST'S FIERY PLANS MIGHT FIZZLE OUT

BY JAYSON JACOBY
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Trevor Lewis was almost ready to start spreading flames when the rain arrived.

The rain stopped. But it was supplanted by snow. Regardless of whether the precipitation has been liquid or frozen, there's simply been too much moisture during April for Lewis and other U.S. Forest Service officials to begin their ambitious plans for prescribed burning on parts of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

"Right now it's just too wet," Lewis said on Tuesday morning, April 26. He's an assistant fire management officer for the Wallowa-Whitman's Burnt Powder Fire Zone, in the fuels division.

Given ideal conditions, forest managers had hoped to light controlled fires on several thousand acres around the south end of the forest, including in the Sumpter and Whitney valley areas and in the southern Wallowas around Balm Creek Reservoir, Lily White and Sparta Butte.

Conditions have not been ideal. Far closer to the opposite, in fact.

See, Forest/Page A3

Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald, File
A La Grande Hot Shot firefighter uses a drip torch to ignite dry grass during a prescribed fire near Phillips Reservoir on April 15, 2021. Conditions have been too wet so far this spring for prescribed burning.

Baker resident sues hospital, surgeon

Plaintiff claims post-surgery infection caused permanent disability

BY JAYSON JACOBY
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A Baker City woman has filed a lawsuit against Saint Alphonsus Medical Center-Baker City and a former surgeon seeking up to \$10 million in damages for injuries she suffered due to an infection following ankle surgery in the spring of 2020.

Nancy Wilson filed the malpractice suit on April 22 in Baker County Circuit Court. The defendants are Saint Alphonsus and Dr. Eric Sandefur, who announced in December 2020 that he would "explore new opportunities in healthcare" and would no longer see patients.

See, Suit/Page A3

Baker Sheriff's Office reports mail theft

Baker City Herald
The Baker County Sheriff's Office recovered several pieces of mail in a ditch near Pocahontas Road on Monday, April 25, after an off-duty Sheriff's Office employee saw the items and reported the find.

The mail was addressed to several addresses in Keating and throughout the Baker Valley. The envelopes had been opened, said Ashley McClay, executive assistant and public information officer for the Sheriff's Office.

Anyone with information about the mail thefts should call Sgt. Craig Rilee at 541-523-6415.

The Sheriff's Office recommends residents follow these precautions:

- Check mailboxes daily.
- If you will be away from home for a period of time, have a relative or friend pick up your mail or ask the Postal Service to hold your mail while you're gone.
- Install a secure, locking mailbox.
- Sign up for the USPS Informed Delivery service, which will allow you to digitally preview your mail and manage your packages scheduled to arrive soon. You can sign up for the Informed Delivery service at <https://informeddelivery.usps.com/box/informed/intro/start.action>.
- Closely monitor your bank accounts and credit reports, which may alert you to any potential identity theft issues.

McClay said theft of mail from boxes is more common in rural areas, where a resident's mailbox can be more than a mile from the home.

County to seek proposals for ambulance services

BY SAMANTHA O'CONNOR
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The Baker County Board of Commissioners took a significant step Wednesday, April 27, toward finding a new ambulance provider for Baker City and more than half of the county should city officials follow through on a plan to stop operating ambulances through the city fire department on Sept. 30, 2022.

Commissioners voted 3-0 to approve a request for proposals (RFP) for an ambulance provider for the Baker Ambulance Service Area.

That area includes Baker City and about two-thirds of the rest of the county, including Baker and Sumpter valleys.

The county has three other ambulance service areas — in the Richland, Halfway and Huntington areas.

By Oregon law, the county, not cities, is responsible for ensuring there is ambulance service in designated areas.

Commission Chairman Bill Harvey said during Wednesday's meeting at

the Courthouse that with the city having set the Sept. 30 deadline, county officials needed to approve the RFP as part of the preparations for finding a replacement provider.

That's likely to be a private company.

The RFP will be posted on the county's website, www.bakercounty.org. The county will accept proposals from possible ambulance providers through June 3. The RFP calls for a minimum 5-year contract.

After reviewing a report from City Manager Jonathan Cannon on March 22, the Baker City Council voted to notify the county that the city intended to discontinue ambulance service Sept. 30.

The reason, Cannon said, is that the city, as has been the case for many years, spends more to operate ambulances than it collects in ambulance billing. The shortfall averaged about \$730,000 for the past five fiscal years, and the city projects a \$581,000 gap for the current fiscal year, which ends June 30, 2022.

Cannon said that with ambulance call volumes increasing, he expects the city would need to hire three more firefighter/paramedics later this year, which would widen that financial gap.

Baker County, which is giving the city \$100,000 for ambulance services this fiscal year, has offered \$150,000 for the fiscal year that starts July 1.

Commissioners said Wednesday they have not received a response from the city to that offer.

Cannon, though, has said he believes the city would need about \$750,000 to be able to continue ambulance services.

If the city does stop operating ambulances, the loss of about \$1 million in annual revenue from ambulance billing would force the city to cut six firefighter/paramedic positions. The fire department is budgeted for 12 positions this fiscal year, although two of those are vacant now.

Baker City Fire Department crews handle far more ambulance calls than fires — about 80% to 85% of calls are for ambulances.

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