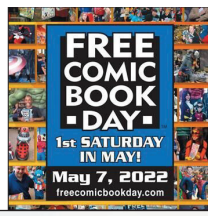




**INSIDE**  
Go! Magazine  
Enjoy birdwatching in Go!



**LOCAL A2**  
Library celebrates Free  
Comic Book Day on Saturday



**SPORTS A6**  
Baker tennis team  
tops Four Rivers

# Baker City Herald

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THURSDAY, MAY 5, 2022 • \$1.50

**QUICK HITS**

**Good Day Wish To A Subscriber**

A special good day to Herald subscriber Jim DeMastus of Baker City.

**BRIEFING**

**Art show, open house May 6 at Baker Early Learning Center**

Baker Early Learning Center, 2725 Seventh St., will have an art show, art sale, live music and open house on Friday, May 6, from 4:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. A free family meal and cookies will be available until 6:30 p.m.

This event is sponsored by the BELC Advisory Council. Proceeds from the art sale will support child care scholarships.

This coincides with the First Friday art walk in Baker City. Other participating places are Crossroads Carnegie Art Center, Royal Artisan, Churchill School, Sweet Wife Baking, Sunn Juice + Decor, White House Art and Design, Ruffled Feathers Boutique and Cody's General Store.

**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.

**WEATHER**

**Today**  
60/42  
Showers



**Wednesday**  
60/40  
Periods of rain



**Full forecast on the back of the B section.**



## FIREFIIGHTERS GO DOOR TO DOOR to urge residents to oppose plan to cut ambulances, reduce staff

Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

**Casey Johnson, a Baker City firefighter/paramedic, knocks on the door of the Baker City home Tuesday morning, May 3, 2022. Johnson, who was joined by Ron Morgan, a district vice president for the Oregon State Firefighters Council, was talking to residents about a city proposal to have the city fire department cease ambulance services Sept. 30, 2022, and cut about half of the firefighting staff.**

**BY JAYSON JACOBY**  
jjacoby@bakercityherald.com

**B**aker City firefighters were joined by a few dozen of their colleagues from around Oregon to go door to door with the message that the city's plan to stop operating ambulances and cut the firefighting staff by about half poses a threat to public safety.

On Tuesday morning, May 3, off-duty firefighters in groups of two fanned out across the city to talk with residents and leave leaflets on doorknobs.

The laminated fliers read: "Baker City: Your safety is at risk! Firefighters protecting our community will be cut by 50%. We need your help to keep Baker City safe."

On the opposite side of the flier the contact information for Baker City Council members is listed.

Tuesday's canvassing of Baker City neighborhoods was coordinated by the Oregon State Firefighters Council.

About 40 firefighters, from cities including Pendleton, La Grande, Hermiston, Portland, Salem, Clackamas and others, gathered at Crossroads Carnegie Art Center to don yellow T-shirts provided by the Firefighters Council, collect handfuls of leaflets and get an assigned neighborhood.

Karl Koenig, a retired firefighter from Happy Valley, near Portland, and president of the Firefighters Council, told the assembled firefighters that the goal was to distribute 1,500 leaflets by noon.

Casey Johnson, a Baker City firefighter/paramedic and president of the local union chapter that represents firefighters, said on Wednesday morning, May 4, that the firefighters distributed 1,200 to 1,500 fliers and talked to about 800 residents.

Johnson said that after walking through neighborhoods across the city, the firefighters reconvened at Crossroads to talk about what they had heard.

"The overarching theme was, 'we support you guys,'" Johnson said.

However, he said he was concerned that some residents, though they said they opposed the proposal to curtail ambulance service and cut the fire department staff, also believed they would have a chance to vote on the matter.

Although city and county officials have discussed the possibility of asking voters to approve a property tax levy to raise money for ambulance service, that likely wouldn't happen before May 2023 — too late to prevent the city from dropping ambulance service and the resulting cuts in staff.

Due to this apparent confusion, Johnson believes Tuesday's event was even more important because firefighters urged residents to express

their concerns to city councilors as soon as possible.

Johnson's enthusiasm after talking with supportive citizens was dampened considerably later on Tuesday, when he attended a meeting of the Baker City Budget Board and watched as the board, which consists of the seven city councilors and seven community members, approved a budget for the coming fiscal year that includes the cessation of ambulance service and loss of six firefighter/paramedics (see related story below).

The budget board's decision isn't final — the City Council has until June 30 to formally approve the budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1.

But Johnson said a closer deadline — June 3 — could well decide the fate of the fire department.

That's the deadline Baker County has set for responses to its request for proposals for providing ambulance service to the Baker Ambulance Service Area. That includes Baker City and about two-thirds of the rest of Baker County. The Baker City Fire Department is the current ambulance provider for that area. The county's request for proposals calls for a minimum 5-year contract.

"If the city does not put in a proposal (by the June 3 deadline), then it's pretty much a done deal, we're a sinking ship," Johnson said.

He called the budget board's vote Tuesday night "another setback."

See, **Firefighters**/Page A3

## Trial delayed for man accused of sex abuse

**Bill David Gonyer, 75, is undergoing chemotherapy and recently suffered a heart attack**

**BY JAYSON JACOBY**

jjacoby@bakercityherald.com

The trial of a Baker County man accused of sexually abusing a child has been moved from next week to late November 2022, almost three years after he was arrested.



Gonyer

Bill David Gonyer, 75, is being treated for cancer, and he suffered a heart attack in March 2022, according to an April 27 motion from his attorney, Damien Yervasi of Baker City.

"During this chemotherapy regime, moving forward with the trial undermines his treatment and could cause prejudicial harm to his health," Yervasi wrote in the motion. "It also forces him to choose between going to trial and forgoing a potentially lifesaving treatment or failing to appear and facing the legal consequences."

Gonyer, who is accused of 15 separate crimes that carry mandatory minimum prison sentences were he convicted, was scheduled to go to trial May 9 in Baker County Circuit Court.

Baker County District Attorney Greg Baxter said on Monday, May 2, that he was prepared for trial but that he understands Gonyer's health problems.

In an April 27 motion in response to Yervasi's motion, Baxter wrote that although he did not object to the motion to delay the trial, "the victim, her family, law enforcement, and I all wish that this case could go to trial in May."

See, **Trial**/Page A3

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

## City budget board OKs plan with fire cuts

### Board members expressed concern with cutting ambulance service, laying off 6 firefighters

**BY SAMANTHA O'CONNOR AND JAYSON JACOBY**  
Baker City Herald

Some members of the Baker City Budget Board expressed concerns about the city's plan to stop operating ambulances Sept. 30, 2022, and lay off six firefighter/paramedics, but the board, after two evenings of meetings, approved the proposed budget, with those changes, on Tuesday, May 3.

The board, which consists of the seven city councilors and seven city residents, started reviewing the budget on Monday, May 2.

The City Council has the final say on the budget, and is required by state law to adopt a spending plan by June 30. The new fiscal year starts July 1.

Budget board chairman Randy Daugherty, who is also a former city councilor, said in an interview on Wednesday, May 4, that although he dislikes the prospect of the city dropping its ambulance service, with the likely result that Baker County will choose a private provider, he doesn't believe it's the budget board's duty to suggest policy changes such as the ambulance service, or to significantly overhaul the proposed budget.

Those are tasks for the City Council, Daugherty said, and if a majority of councilors were to tell Cannon to prepare a new proposed budget that retains ambulance service, and avoids the layoffs in the fire department, Cannon "would have to find a way to do that"

City Councilor Johnny Waggoner Sr. said the ambulance issue will be on the agenda for the Council's next meeting, May 10.

Daugherty said he believes the city could revise the budget to maintain ambulance service, and an intact fire department, for one more fiscal year.

But he believes that would put the city in a precarious financial position a year from now. Daugherty pointed out that \$700,000 of the revenue included in the proposed \$7.8 million general fund for the next fiscal year — the general fund includes both the fire and police departments — is federal COVID-19 relief that the city won't receive in future years.

"I'm concerned like every other citizen in this town," Daugherty said.

He said he believes Baker County, which by state statute is responsible for ensuring

there is ambulance service in the county — although the law doesn't require the county to pay for the service — needs to contribute more than the \$150,000 that the county is currently offering to give the city for the upcoming fiscal year, a \$50,000 increase from the current fiscal year.

Daugherty suggested a figure in the range of \$250,000 to \$300,000 for the county for the new fiscal year.

He said it's not reasonable to expect city property owners to "foot the bill" through their taxes for ambulance service not only within the city limits, but in about two-thirds of the rest of the county that constitutes the Baker Ambulance Service Area.

Shelly Cutler, who is one of the seven citizen members of the budget board, said she is bothered that the city is talking about installing a new sprinkler system at Quail Ridge Golf

Course given the proposed cuts to the fire department.

The proposed budget includes a \$120,000 transfer from the general fund to the golf course fund for the coming fiscal year.

"That boggles my mind that we're having that same conversation that we're going to remove that ambulance and those folks that are coming to your rescue, but we're going to find the money for a sprinkler system for the golf course," Cutler said.

In explaining why the city is proposing to curtail ambulance service — the City Council set the date as Sept. 30, 2022, in a notice it sent to the county on March 22 — Cannon said the city continues to spend more money every year operating ambulances than it collects in ambulance bills.

See, **Budget**/Page A3



**TODAY**  
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