

Firefighters

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Taking the message directly to residents

Johnson joined Ron Morgan, a district vice president for the Firefighters Council, to talk to residents in northeast Baker City, along H and Birch streets, on a sunny but blustery Tuesday morning.

Johnson said it is "real humbling to see the support and have like-minded firefighters from throughout the state who see the crisis that's been created and want to help get the message out."

Johnson said he believes it's crucial that Baker City residents hear directly from firefighters.

He and Morgan encouraged residents to support the firefighters and to express their concerns to the City Council.

"People need to actually take action and not just be mad about it," Johnson said.

The firefighters' effort was prompted by the Baker City Council's decision on March 22 to notify Baker County, which by Oregon law is responsible for providing ambulance service, that the city intended to stop operating ambulances Sept. 30, 2022.

If that happened, the county would have to find a different provider, likely a private ambulance company, to replace the city fire department.

Baker City Manager Jonathan Cannon, who recommended the City Council send the notice to the county on March 22, contends that the city can't afford to continue operating ambulances beyond Sept. 30.

Cannon cited the shortfall between what the city spends to operate ambulances and the amount it collects from patients.

The city, for at least a couple decades, hasn't collected the full amount it bills, largely because a majority of the patients it transports — about 80% — don't have private insurance but are covered by either of two federal programs, Medicare and Medicaid.

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Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

Baker City firefighter/paramedic Casey Johnson, left, president of the local union chapter that represents Baker City firefighters, and Ron Morgan, a district vice president for the Oregon State Firefighters Council, went door to door in Baker City on Tuesday morning, May 3, 2022, to urge residents to oppose a city proposal to end ambulance service Sept. 30, 2022, forcing Baker County to find a different provider.

"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."

— Casey Johnson, president of local union chapter representing Baker City Fire Department firefighter/paramedics

Those programs reimburse the city for only about 20% of the amount it bills, according to the city.

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 City's firefighter/paramedics are cross-trained, meaning they respond to both fires and to ambulance calls and other emergencies. Ambulance runs account for 80% to 85% of the department's calls.

Johnson, the local union president, disputes both Cannon's con-

textion that the city would need to hire three new employees later this year, and that the city can't afford to maintain ambulance service for at least the fiscal year that starts July 1.

"The city manager is railroad-ing this idea that the city is going to be bankrupt, and many of the city councilors are buying into it hook, line and sinker," Johnson said. "I don't think that's the reality of the situation."

He said the city is not a business, and due to the lower reimbursement rates for Medicare and Medicaid, and the predominance of ambulance patients who have that coverage, the city is never going to break even.

But Johnson points out that the city spends even more for its police department — about \$2.56 million budgeted for the current fiscal year, compared with \$2.32 million for

the fire department — and "doesn't expect police to write enough traffic tickets to pay for itself."

Johnson also notes that the city, despite the difference between the amount it bills for ambulance service and the amount it collects over many years, has not had to cut other departments within the city's general fund, including police and fire, which make up about 62% of general fund costs, to keep the fire department afloat.

Johnson does agree that if ambulance call volume trends continue, the city would need to hire more staff eventually.

He said the union's goal is to keep the city's ambulance service operating for at least the next fiscal year, which starts July 1, 2022. That would give city and county officials time to look for a new, stable revenue source. They have recently discussed asking voters to approve a property tax levy or to form a new taxing district for public safety.

State union president calls city plan 'irresponsible'

Koenig, president of the Oregon State Firefighters Council, called Baker City's proposal to cease ambulance service and cut the firefighting staff by six "irresponsible and political suicide."

"We've got a problem here, it's going the wrong way," Koenig said.

He said the Firefighters Council, which represents about 3,700 career firefighter/paramedics in Oregon, responds to situations where both public safety and the safety of firefighters is threatened.

Baker City is such a case, Koenig contends.

Replacing Baker City Fire Department ambulance crews with a private company is not acceptable, he said.

Koenig believes Baker City residents will respond to the firefighters' plea to tell city councilors they oppose the proposal to cease ambulance service Sept. 30.

When residents call 911, Koenig said, they "expect to hear the siren before they hang up the phone."

He urges city and county officials to work together to find "creative ways" to increase revenue for ambulance service, and to "solve this problem way before Sept. 30" — the deadline the city has set to discontinue ambulance service.

"These firefighter/paramedics have never quit on the city," Koenig said.

Budget

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The average shortfall has averaged about \$730,000 per year over the past five fiscal years, and the city projects a \$581,000 gap for the current fiscal year, which ends June 30, 2022.

"This issue about funding kept coming up over and over again until around 2016 where the city said, 'look, the money's not there, we can't do this, we need a funding source' and the county said we'll release an RFP," Cannon said — meaning a request for proposals to provide ambulance service.

The county did so in 2018 and ultimately received three bids, one from Baker City and two from private firms. The county tabled the matter, however, and the city has continued to serve as ambulance provider without a contract.

Cannon said city and county officials have discussed a potential long-term, new revenue source such as a property tax levy that covers the entire ambulance service area, not just Baker City, or an ambulance service district, which would have a similar revenue source.

But either option would require voter approval, and it's not likely that such a proposal could get on the ballot before May 2023.

As of now, Cannon said, "we just don't have the money for it."

The city has not had to make significant cuts in its general fund, however, despite the shortfalls in ambulance revenue, compared to its cost, over the past five years.

During that period the police department's annual budget — the biggest in the general fund — has increased from a bit less than \$2 million to \$2.56 million in the current fiscal year.

The city's beginning fund balance — in effect, its cash on hand at the start of the fiscal year — has risen from about \$1.2 million in the 2018-19 fiscal year to \$1.63 million in the current fiscal year.

City Councilor Dean Guyer said the Council didn't decide to suddenly pull the rug out from beneath the county with the March 22 notice setting the Sept. 30 deadline for stopping ambulance service.

"The city is just the contractor now and we don't even have a contract that's signed and we haven't been receiving the proceeds from the county," Guyer said.

City Councilor Shane Alderson said what he had come up with if the city continued for another fiscal year with ambulance service and the current staffing in the fire department, the city would realize a loss of about \$425,000 more in the general fund.



Cannon

Trial

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"I have reviewed Mr. Yervasi's motion. I believe that he has satisfied the Court's parameters to get a continuance."

In his April 27 motion, Yervasi wrote that Gonyer was not able to participate in a trial starting May 9.

"Mr. Gonyer's chemotherapy has affected his cognitive abilities through the well-documented condition known as 'chemobrain' or 'chemo fog,'" Yervasi wrote. "Mr. Gonyer's chemotherapy and other health conditions prevent him from actively participating in his defense by potentially analyzing the facts or preparing to testify. He is unable because he is often too sick, tired, or confused."

Yervasi also cited another factor that has left the defense unprepared to go to trial this month.

He wrote that an investigator the defense hired to review electronic devices and data that police seized from Gonyer estimated it would take up to 100 hours to analyze the documents and devices.

As of the end of March, the defense investigator had spent

40 hours reviewing the materials, Yervasi wrote.

The process takes considerable time because the defense investigator is allowed to examine the data only at an Oregon Department of Justice office, Yervasi wrote. The next visit was scheduled for May 3-4.

"Forcing the defense to go to trial without finalizing this examination creates an extreme prejudice against the Defendant," Yervasi wrote.

He also wrote in the April 27 motion that a different defense investigator has been unable to work on the case recently while caring for a severely ill family member.

Baxter said Gonyer has been living in the Boise area.

Gonyer no longer is required to wear an ankle monitor, which allows police to monitor his movements, because a doctor determined that the monitor was restricting blood flow, Baxter said.

Gonyer, who lived on Stices Gulch Road about 12 miles south of Baker City, was initially arrested on Dec. 28, 2019, in Ada County, Idaho, where he was receiving medical care. He was extradited to Baker County in early January 2020 and was held at the Baker County Jail until

December 2020, when Judge Thomas B. Powers granted a motion from Yervasi to grant Gonyer a conditional release so he could get medical treatment at the Boise VA Hospital and other facilities.

Gonyer lived in a motel in Baker City during 2021, but he was required to wear the ankle monitor at that time.

Gonyer originally was indicted on several crimes related to the sexual assault of a girl younger than 14 who was known to him, the crimes allegedly happening between May 1, 2019, and Dec. 20, 2019.

- Five counts of first-degree sexual abuse, a Class B felony.
- Two counts of second-degree sexual abuse, a Class C felony.
- Six counts of third-degree sexual abuse, a Class A misdemeanor.
- Two counts of second-degree unlawful sexual penetration, a Class B felony.
- Two counts of contributing to the sexual abuse of a minor, a Class A misdemeanor.
- One count of first-degree rape, a Class A felony.
- One count of second-degree rape, a Class B felony.
- One count of third-degree rape, a Class C felony.

- One count of luring a minor, a Class C felony.
- One count of using a child in a display of sexually explicit conduct, a Class A felony.
- Six counts of felon in possession of a firearm, a Class C felony.

In February 2021 several other charges were added, including four counts of first-degree encouraging child sexual abuse and four counts of second-degree encouraging child sexual abuse. Those charges are related to child pornography discovered on Gonyer's computer during the course of the investigation, Baxter said.

The pornography doesn't involve the child who is Gonyer's alleged victim in the other incidents, which police said happened between May 1, 2019, and Dec. 20, 2019.

Gonyer is a registered sex offender. He was convicted of the felony crime of sexual abuse in Clackamas County in 1999. Gonyer, who was living at Gladstone at the time, was sentenced to 75 months

in prison after pleading guilty to one count of first-degree sexual abuse involving a girl

younger than 14, court documents state. That crime took place in February 1998.

Recommended candidates by the Baker County Republican Executive Committee

Baker City Precincts

Precinct #1 (Vote for 5)

Sharon Bass
Brandy Bruce
Chuck Chase
Bradley Golar
Duane Morris

Precinct #2 (Vote for 6)

Nora Bass
Michael Bennett
Sue Holtz
Megan Langan
Marilyn Shollenberger
Johnny Waggoner Sr.

Precinct #3 (Vote for 6)

Tisha Bass
Bill Brown
Debbie Brown
Joanna Dixon
Ray Dixon
Jodi Furtney

Precinct #4 (Vote for 7)

Doni Bruland
John Beatty
Shelly Cutler
Ed Hardt
Rebekka Hughes
Candis Lee
Kerry McQuisten

Precinct #5 (Vote for 7)

Janice Burchard
Donn Christy
Terrie Evarts
Kimberly Hughes
Thomas Hughes
Justin Langan
Samantha Tugman

Precinct #13 - Baker County (Vote for 4)

Mike Miller
Shannon Black
Whitney Black
Tom Van Diepen

Precinct #17 - Haines (Vote for 3)

David Sherman
Kathleen Sherman
Connie Pound Lewis

Precinct #18 - Hereford (Vote for 2)

Keith L. Jones
Suzan Ellis Jones

Precinct #22 Halfway (Vote for 1)

Kathryn Grace

Precinct #24 - Pocomo (Vote for 4)

LeeAnn Haberle
Peggie Longwell
Jeff Nelson
Joshua Srack

Precinct #25 Sumpter (Vote for 1)

Jullie McKinney

Precinct #28 Unity (Vote for 2)

Patty Trost
Jim Juhola

