

Ethics complaint against Prairie City officials investigated

Investigator: appears no one intentionally violated executive session law

By Sean Hart
Blue Mountain Eagle

State investigators are looking into a possible ethics violation by Prairie City officials.

The Oregon Government Ethics Commission voted 7-1 to investigate a possible violation of Oregon's executive session law by Mayor Jim Hamsher and Councilors Carole Garrison, Georgia Patterson, Les Church, Frank Primozić and Joe Phippen Jan. 5. Oregon law provides a narrow list of matters that entities may discuss in private, outside of open session, if proper notice is given, but no final decisions may be made.

Commission investigator Michael Thornicroft told the Prairie City officials the pos-



Prairie City City Council meets in this file photo. The Oregon Government Ethics Commission is investigating a possible executive session violation by the city council.

sible violation did not appear to be intentional, in a Jan. 2 letter provided by Hamsher.

"Should the Commissioners vote to move this matter to an investigation, my recommendation to the Director and the Commissioners will be that this matter be settled with a Letter of Education

and not a fine," Thornicroft wrote. "It appears from the Preliminary Review that the Executive Session was done in good faith and it does not appear that anyone intentionally violated Executive Session provisions."

Prairie City resident Dan Becker said he filed the com-

plaint after an August city council meeting where an executive session was held that was not included on the agenda. After the executive session, he said, the council reconvened in open session and voted to give a raise to the city public works director.

He said he filed the com-



Prairie City Mayor and Grant County Commissioner Jim Hamsher.

plaint in November to get the attention of the council without causing financial hardship to the city, in hopes of getting them to obey open meeting laws.

"They need to allow the public an opportunity to know what they're going to be discussing," Becker said.

Oregon law requires public bodies to provide at least 24 hours notice for meetings, except in the case of an actual emergency. An executive session notice must include the

"specific statutory provision(s) authorizing the executive session," according to the Attorney General's Public Records and Meeting Manual 2014.

Hamsher said a city employee requested to discuss personnel matters in executive session right before the meeting, and the council "didn't want to take the chance of talking about personnel matters we could get sued over." He said, at the time, they believed the matter was a labor negotiation — which is allowed as an executive session if negotiators from both sides request it to be, and which is the only executive session allowed without public notice — before learning labor negotiations were related to unions.

Hamsher, who is running for county judge in the upcoming election, said he believed the ethics complaint was politically motivated.

"I think bringing this up at this point is just trying to smear the city," he said. "It's just a way to slander me before the election."

Superintendent reports on school disciplinary policies

Shelley: Some improvements are needed

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant School District 3's disciplinary policies are in compliance with state requirements, but some improvements could be made, Superintendent Curt Shelley told the school board during its April 18 meeting in Seneca.

The matter was brought up at the board's March 21 meeting by Baker City attorney Kyra Rohner-Ingram, who represented a student suspended from Grant Union High School following an Oct. 4 incident involving marijuana use and possession. She told the Eagle that district policy was not being followed correctly.

Rohner-Ingram was joined by Tracey Blood and Lisa Weigum, who expressed concerns that the district's policies deprived students of essential support services and implemented discipline, not intervention.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the board asked Shelley to review the district's suspension and expulsion policies and present a report at their next meeting.

Shelley reported April 18 that he asked Salem-based attorney Rebecca Jacobson to review the district's policies to see if they complied with state requirements.

Jacobson found that the district's policies complied with state rules, but some policies should be included in an updated student handbook, Shelley said. The handbook is available online.



Grant School District 3 board vice chairman Zach Williams, left, and Superintendent Curt Shelley during a meeting in Seneca on April 18.

Jacobson also found that a signed agreement was needed when alternative education is provided in lieu of expulsion. This would provide a better explanation of what additional supports would be available for students under the district's disciplinary process. A written plan would be created, and a copy would be provided to parents, Shelley said.

Students receiving discipline need additional support, Shelley told the Eagle. The district needs to work through this matter and make improvements, he said.

School board member Haley Walker told the Eagle the district is working through a process to ensure the district is in line with state requirements and to ensure the district is doing what's right for students.

"We asked the superintendent to follow up on our policies, and if we need more we'll ask for it," she said.

Blood was present at the April 18 meeting and told the Eagle she was encouraged by Shelley's acknowledgment of a need for improvement.

"I look forward to seeing that happen," she said. "I see opportunities for the district to improve."

One thing Blood said she'd like to see more of is the trauma-informed approach to counseling, which takes into account the long-term effects of trauma on the brains of young people as they grow up. Some of the students who get into trouble at school need this additional support, she said.

"I'd like to see that approach built into the district's disciplinary policy," she said.

New publisher takes reins

By Antonio Sierra
EO Media Group



Chris Rush

Chris Rush will be new to Eastern Oregon, but he's no stranger to community journalism.

EO Media Group recently named Rush as the regional publisher and revenue director of the East Oregonian, Hermiston Herald, Blue Mountain Eagle and Wallowa County Chieftain.

He will replace Kathryn Brown, who has been publisher of the East Oregonian and Hermiston Herald since 2013. Brown has been interim publisher of the Eagle and Chieftain since former publisher Marissa Williams left in March for a new position at the Retreat & Links at Silvie Valley Ranch.

Rush, a 25-year veteran of the journalism industry and native of Tulsa, Oklahoma, had an inauspicious start to his career.

Equipped with a bachelor's degree from Oklahoma State University and a master's degree from the University of Central Oklahoma, Rush had trouble breaking into the field as a young man in 1993. He had sent dozens of résumés to various news organizations when he applied for a reporting position with the Sapulpa Daily Herald, a newspaper based in a Tulsa suburb of about 20,000 people.

Noticing his experience selling furniture and men's clothing, the Daily Herald instead offered Rush an advertising job, which paid a commission in addition to a base salary.

"At that time, I had just gotten married, and that sounded good to me," he said.

His foot in the door, Rush crisscrossed Oklahoma and Arkansas as a reporter, editor, advertising director and publisher.

Rush moved to Aberdeen, Washington, in 2008 to become

the publisher of The Daily World and, after a brief stint back in Oklahoma, became publisher of The World in Coos Bay in 2015.

Although Rush's career had been made in print journalism, in 2017 he retired from the newspaper business and bought a coffee shop in Reedsport, which he ran with his wife, Sheryl, for the past eight months.

It was a longtime dream, but running the Rogue River Coffee Co. was also a rigorous enterprise.

"I got a lot of respect for anyone who owns a business," he said.

All the while, Rush kept tabs on his old profession.

He had originally thought about taking an interim publisher position somewhere to supplement the coffee shop's income, but when the publishing job in Eastern Oregon opened up, he couldn't pass on the opportunity.

EO Media Group officials believe Rush is the right person for the job.

"Chris is uniquely qualified to take on this leadership role for our company," said Heidi Wright, EO Media Group chief operating officer. "He is excited to be working with a family-held media company that shares his passion for the

communities we serve and the newspapers we produce."

Brown said Rush was a worthy successor.

"Chris is also a highly intelligent, friendly and positive person," she said. "He shares our family's values and a passion for community journalism, and I expect that he will be a great fit here in Eastern Oregon."

Rush said he's always been attracted to living and working in small communities and he intends to keep the media group's four Eastern Oregon newspapers focused on community news.

Rush will arrive in Eastern Oregon Thursday, and he and Brown will spend the coming weeks working on the transition between publishers.

Brown will be stepping down from her role as publisher of the East Oregonian and Hermiston Herald in order to launch a magazine called "The Other Oregon," focusing on rural Oregon's issues, values, culture and lifestyle. She will remain on the East Oregonian's editorial board and will be involved in special projects at the newspaper. She also serves on the EO Media Group's board of directors as an owner of the company.

Rush will move to Pendleton with his wife. He has two adult children, a son who will graduate from Oklahoma State University this spring and a daughter attending the school as well.

Great things are happening!



- ▶ Women's basketball standout Maya Ah You-Dias earned the NAIA's national character award
- ▶ EOU's Trapshooting Club made its first appearance at national competition
- ▶ 180 regional teens tried hands-on STEM activities at the IMESD Tech Expo on campus

For more information visit eou.edu/connected

EASTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY

Attention Grant County Veterans:



Did you know Grant County Veterans Services Officer is available to assist YOU in applying for all VA benefits you may be entitled to?

See your Grant County Veteran Services Officer today for more information, located at Grant County Court House.

Katee Hoffman
10am-4pm Monday-Friday • 541-620-8057
530 E. Main, Ste. 5, John Day, OR

Cinco de Mayo Train Ride!

Delicious Mexican Food
Fantastic Grande Ronde Scenery!
May 5, 11 a.m.
Elgin, Oregon
Mother's Day Brunch
May 13
Book online, eaglecaptrainrides.com or call 800.323.7330

ELTRUM HISTORIC THEATER
1809 First Street • Baker City • (541) 523-5439
BARGAIN MOVIE IN (7) Adults \$7
ALL FILMS \$6 ON TIGHT WAD TUESDAY
MOVIE SCHEDULE MAY 4-10
AVENGERS: INFINITY WAR (PG-13)
The Avengers and their allies must be willing to sacrifice all in an attempt to defeat the powerful Thanos before his blitz of devastation and ruin puts an end to the universe.
FRI - SUN (4:00) 7:30
MON-THURS (4:20) 7:00
SUPER TROOPERS 2 (R)
When a border dispute arises between the U.S. and Canada, the Super Troopers are tasked with establishing a Highway Patrol station in the disputed area.
FRI & SAT (4:20) 7:20 9:40
SUNDAY (4:20) 7:20
MON-WED 7:20
LEEL PATTY (PG-13)
A woman wakes from a fall believing she is the most beautiful and capable woman on the planet.
FRI & SAT (4:10) 7:10 9:35
SUNDAY (4:10) 7:10
MON-THUR 7:10
\$9 Adult, \$7 Senior (60+), Youth

Notice
Grant County Taxpayers
The third and final installment of the 2017-18 property tax is due Tuesday, May 15th, 2018 by 5:00 p.m.
Payments may be made at the Tax Collector's Office at the Grant County Courthouse in Canyon City, or the payment may be mailed and postmarked no later than May 15th, 2018. Please remember that delinquent taxes accrue interest at the rate of 16% per year.
If you have any questions, please call the tax office at 575-0107 or 575-0189.
PO Box 185
Canyon City, OR 97820

NOW RECEIVING APPLICATIONS FROM VETERAN HOMEOWNERS

Community Connection has funds available for home repair for qualified veterans in Union, Wallowa, Baker and Grant counties. Eligible projects include, but are not limited to:

- Electrical
- Plumbing
- Roof/Gutters
- Foundation
- Porches/Steps
- Windows/Doors
- Sagging Floors
- Heating System
- Add Ramps
- Widen Driveways
- Siding/Paint
- Insulation

If you are a veteran who owns or is in the process of buying your home and you are interested in the Veteran's Home Improvement Program, please call Community Connection at (541) 963-3186 for more information. **Income limitations apply.**