

John Day council gives Green a raise

Other city staff compensation under review

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle



Eagle file photo

John Day City Manager Nick Green.

The John Day City Council unanimously approved an increase to City Manager Nick Green's compensation package at their May 22 meeting.

Councilor Dave Holland, who led the performance review and compensation evaluation effort for the council, recommended an 8.4 percent increase to Green's salary, a \$10,000 payment for the extra work Green handled over the past year and a 1 percent administrative fee on future grants that allow that type of compensation.

Green's salary increase from \$69,721 to \$75,578 per year will start with the new fiscal year on July 1. The \$10,000 payment was made effective May 1.

Anna Bass of Oster Professional Group, who helps Green develop a budget for the city, said the salary increase and \$10,000 payment were included in the next fiscal year's budget.

The council held a public hearing on the fiscal year 2019 budget as approved by the city's budget committee and will vote to approve the \$11.5 million budget at their June 12 meeting.

Green told the council that engineers and other consultants who are involved in grants for cities typically want from 3 percent to 20 percent of the grant funding. He also noted that hiring another person to handle grants would cost the city more.

The council also learned the results of a salary survey and total compensation analysis of non-union staff by the Local Government Personnel Institute. The survey looked at pay for 13 city positions and city compensation policies and compared them to 10 cities in Oregon.

Green said John Day had not conducted this type of analysis in a long time and noted, while each city handles pay and compensation differently, John Day's declining economy is unique.

He told the council he personally liked to see the city run with the leanest number of staff possible, but there were caveats.

"We are in a difficult position because we are trying to recover from 30 years of population and economic decline," he said in his council memo. "The city should not make financial commitments today that it cannot afford in future years or that would delay our economic recovery. At the same time, we need to recognize that under compensating our staff may result in higher employee turnover."

The institute found that John Day city salaries were below market in every category. At the same time, John Day was the only city in the survey to pay overtime to department heads other than the city manager.

The institute also found that John Day offered a max accrual of 260 days sick leave while other cities offered from 10 days to unlimited. Health insurance benefits were considered competitive, with John Day at the low end. And while most cities offered 10 to 12 paid holidays per year, John Day offered eight with two floating holidays.

In his memo to the council, Green said compensation for salary staff should be based on market conditions, experience, job requirements and the city's ability to pay.

"In addition to these factors, there are ethical considerations about what is just and fair," Green said. "The salaries public employees receive impact public perception and trust."

The city's non-union salaried workers are currently

classified into 14 grades, each with seven steps about 5 percent apart. An alternative approach is performance-based compensation. Green recommended changing compensation for department heads from the step-grade system to a salary with a bonus provision.

Green said next year's budget allows for spot adjustments to salaries that are significantly below market, adding two paid holidays and capping sick leave accrual at 90 days. In the future, the city could consider consolidating all sick leave, comp time and vacation into one paid-time-off category, he said.

The council reacted favorably to Green's proposal. Mayor Lundbom and Councilors Shannon Adair and Steve Schuette said they liked the recommendation. But the suggestion that workers under the step-grade system received automatic pay raises was corrected by Holland, who noted that in his 37 years experience with the city, workers were reviewed annually. Pay increases were still an earned raise, and the step-grade system was only a guide, he said.

Councilor Brandon Smith asked about the potential impact on people from outside the area who might look for a job with the city of John Day, and whether they would find the city's compensation package unattractive. Green responded by noting that his recommendation for now was only for the department heads.

Hallgarth selected as school superintendent in Prairie City

Humbolt sixth-grade teacher moving to administration

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

A new superintendent/principal will take the helm at Prairie City School District next fall.

Humbolt Elementary sixth-grade teacher Casey Hallgarth will leave his current position in June and begin his new job July 1.

Julie Gurczynski, who has led Prairie City School for the past three years, submitted her resignation with plans to move closer to family at the end of the school year.

Hallgarth, who moved to John Day four years ago to work for Grant School District, said becoming an administrator is something he's been working toward for a long time.

"It's a great opportunity for me and my family," he said, adding he didn't think an opening would present itself this soon.

He said he's been working on his administrative degree while gaining teaching experience.

"When I put my name in the hat, I thought what a great learning experience it would be for me," he said. "They gave me a call to offer the job."

Lindsay Rausch, school board chairman for the Prairie City School District, said she and others have been impressed with Hallgarth.

"We were struck by his initiative," she said. "He's shown a lot of interest in our school. He's attended the last five or six school board meetings."

She said another draw is Hallgarth's interest in staying in the community and learning about being an administrator in a small community.

"Between the enthusiasm and positive interview in a town hall forum with community members, board members and staff, we took input from all three parties, and he



Casey Hallgarth



Julie Gurczynski

matched the criteria for what everybody said they wanted," she said. "He was a unanimous choice."

Nancy Hitz, vice chairman of the board, was one of those unanimous voices.

"I'm really excited, and I welcome Casey and the leadership he's bringing to our school district," she said.

Gurczynski said she's enjoyed her experience working for the district.

"The staff worked extremely hard for past three years, and we saw significant growth in our test scores," she said.

Math scores went up 8 percent, English and language arts up 9 percent and science up 10 percent, she said.

In the past year, the elementary students also had a 10 percent increase in their DIBELS reading scores.

Gurczynski was also pleased to receive a grant to become an Oregon Response to Intervention district at the grade school.

"We truly have a great staff at Prairie City Schools, and I will miss working with them," she said. "I will also miss the students."

The students have been friendly, hardworking and fun to be around, she said.

"I loved sitting in the stands watching the ball games, being part of the FFA barbecues and clean-ups, attending the carnival and fun run, plus participating in the homecoming week activities," she said.

She said, "I wish for all the students that all their dreams

will come true."

Hallgarth said Prairie City School is "on the up side."

"They already have a great staff established and traditions there," he said. "I just want to emphasize those qualities and try to make them better. What they have going on right now is great. It's a tight-knit community."

Besides teaching, Hallgarth has also enjoyed coaching.

He led the Grant Union girls basketball team as head coach to fourth place at the state championships this year. He also coached Grant Union junior high football and was an assistant varsity coach. Before arriving in John Day, he coached basketball and football in Elgin for seven years.

While at Grant School District, he organized trips to Washington, D.C., for his sixth-graders to take when they reached eighth grade, fundraising during the two years.

Hallgarth and his wife, Heidi, have two children, Cameron, who will soon graduate from Grant Union, and Quinten, finishing his freshman year. Heidi is the office manager at Grant School District.

When asked what he'll miss about teaching, Hallgarth said seeing the students grow throughout the year.

"They become your class," he said. "We form a bond, and as teachers we take pride in those relationships."

Hallgarth said he hopes to bring leadership qualities, as well as cohesiveness, to create a better team atmosphere at Prairie City School District.

"You have teachers who want to make a difference, coaches, classified staff, everybody, they're there for the right reasons, and that's the goal, to be there for the kids and their education," he said.

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