

Rookstool wins tie-breaking coin toss for John Day City Council seat

New councilor wants people to feel their voices are heard

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Heather Rookstool won the final spot on the John Day City Council by the toss of a coin.

Rookstool and Chris Labhart remained tied with 470 votes each after a hand count on Nov. 16.

The John Day City Council motioned to break the tie between Labhart and Rookstool through a coin toss on Dec. 8, which was recommended by the city's legal counsel.

Councilor Paul Smith designated Labhart as heads and Rookstool with the other side of the coin, which depicted a handshake.



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz
Heather Rookstool and Chris Labhart look on to see who will join the John Day City Council during a coin toss Dec. 8.

John Day City Manager Nick Green flipped the coin as Rookstool and Labhart watched the proceedings. The coin landed on the



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz
John Day City Manager Nick Green flips a coin to break the tie for the final city council seat between Heather Rookstool and Chris Labhart on Dec. 8.

handshake, sending Rookstool to the city council.

Both Labhart and Rookstool were satisfied with the decision to break the tie

through a coin toss.

Rookstool said it was a "cool" election experience but also an odd way to win. "When Nick flipped the

coin I was like uhhh (in anticipation)," Rookstool said. "I always pick tails when flipping a coin, but I thought it was funny that Paul actually picked tails for me because that's always my go to."

Rookstool said a big reason why she wanted to join the city council was to better support small businesses.

She said she wants to be an advocate for small businesses in John Day, talking to them and representing their voices to the city council, especially with the impact COVID-19 has had on businesses this year.

"My biggest passion and reason to get on the council was to help budget-wise and mainly support small businesses," Rookstool said. "Without small businesses, we don't have a community to live in, and I hope I can

be a voice for those businesses and our community as a whole."

Rookstool said positive things have been happening in the community such as the planned Dollar General store, the Thadd's Place grief center and the developing parks in the city, but some of the small businesses feel like their voices are underrepresented at times.

"I think the community as a whole needs to feel like their voice is heard at the city council," Rookstool said, "and that was my drive to hopefully be that voice."

Rookstool will join incumbents David Holland and Elliot Sky, who were both reelected in November, as well as councilors Shannon Adair, Paul Smith and Gregg Haberly, who were not up for reelection.

John Day plans to restore water to Boring Properties rentals

Tenants could pay for water directly while issues with landlord are being resolved

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Tenants at Boring Properties rentals in John Day could soon have water again.

The John Day City Council moved Dec. 8 to allow tenants of Boring Properties LLC rentals on Southwest Brent Drive to establish temporary utility accounts directly with the city while issues with the landlord paying the utilities are being resolved.

John Day City Manager Nick Green said the city decided to shut off water service to several rentals owned by Boring Properties because the company owed the city more than \$2,700 in past due utility fees and a leak on the property was never addressed. Green said they did not receive a response from the landlord after reaching out to them regarding the issues. Boring Properties has not responded to messages left by the Eagle.

"I don't have the authority to incur losses to the city when the landlord isn't paying their bills and isn't correcting the issue," Green said. "However, that impacted the tenants, and they've been without water for two weeks."

The leak on the property is about 2 gallons a minute, which is roughly 86,000 gallons a month, according to Green.

Councilor Dave Holland asked if the city could repair the leak and charge it to the property owner. Holland said he hated seeing people forced to live in poor conditions because of something that is out of their control.

"To have them without water because the landlord is



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz
The John Day City Council discusses Boring Properties rentals and utility services at the Dec. 8 city council meeting.

unwilling to pay, I don't know that that's the way it should be handled, other than using our remedies available to recoup our money in the long run," Holland said.

Green said the city is currently giving the property owner due process after the city sent a letter to Boring Properties LLC owner Darrin Manuel on Dec. 2. This gives Boring Properties 15 days to address the leak and make their account current with the city.

On day 16, if the property owners fail to respond or act on the request, Green can request an administrative warrant and have the city fix the leak and restore water.

The city can take an action sooner if the property owner gives permission for the city to fix the leak and negotiates an agreement for repaying the city for the cost.

Green said the city's sewer and water funds can absorb the extent of the losses they would incur while fixing this issue.

Another option discussed was finding transitional housing for the tenants so the city could proceed to revoke the certificate of occupancy for the violations identified at the property.

"Personally, I would like to see city do what we can to help the tenants not live anymore miserably than they already

have to," Holland said. Councilor Paul Smith asked if something could be done in the short term to help the tenants while waiting on the landlord.

Green said, if the tenants would be willing to pay the utility bill directly to the city and the council approved that as a temporary measure until the abatement issues are resolved, then water could be restored for now.

The city council passed a motion to allow the tenants of Boring Properties to establish temporary, individual accounts with the city to make payments for their utilities until the leak has been repaired and code enforcement issues have been abated, at which point the charges would go back directly to the landlord.

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The Eagle/Rudy Diaz
Sean McGee of John Day said he gets water from Canyon Creek so he can flush his toilet after the city shut off water to his rental property when the landlord stopped paying utilities.

THE JUNIPER ARTS COUNCIL / GRANT COUNTY CULTURAL COALITION IS SEEKING GRANT PROPOSALS FOR OREGON CULTURAL TRUST GRANT AWARDS

The coalition has \$7,000 from the Oregon Cultural Trust to distribute in Grant County to organizations for projects relating to culture and / or heritage.

Applications are available from Karin Barntish, 131 W. Main Street, John Day, Oregon, or call Kris Beal at (541)932-4892 for more information or an application.

Grant applications will be accepted until January 8, 2021 5 P.M.

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