

Lexington gets a full council

Mayor to challenge appointment



New Lexington town council member Curtis Thompson is sworn into office by town recorder Dawn Greisen, while Mayor Marcia Kemp and councilmembers Marcia Sticka, Bobbi Gordon and Bill Beard look on. -Photo by David Sykes.

By David Sykes

After months of haggling, Lexington now has a full town council. Curtis Thompson was sworn in last Tuesday, filling a vacancy that has been open since last year. The appointment was made over objections from Mayor Marcia Kemp, who said the appointment violated the town charter. Kemp and the council, along with members of the public, have been arguing since January about who should fill the vacant seat, with the discussion often becoming contentious, including verbally rowdy council meetings, letters to the editor and opinions from attorneys. The origins of the dispute go back to when Deona Siex, a council member, resigned last year. The vacant position was first attempted to be filled at a meeting in January when former councilmember, Sheila Miller, submitted a letter of interest. Mayor Kemp, at that time, stated, "I will not allow it." Since then council members Bill Beard and Bobbi Gordon have argued that according to the charter, the mayor has the right to vote only in the event of a tie. Kemp on the other hand has said the charter also gives her the right to vote to fill vacant council positions. This disagreement has resulted in a stalemate with no appointment having been made. The dispute came to a head several months ago when Curtis Thompson expressed his interest in filling the empty council seat. Kemp and Sticka opposed his appointment, while councilmembers Bobbi Gordon and Bill Beard favored it. Disagreement arose when Kemp once again said she had authority through the charter to vote on filling vacant seats. Beard and Gordon disagreed, so the appointment remained at a two to two deadlock. Kemp said she was opposed to the appointment of Thompson because he

had contacted the Wasco city attorney for his opinion, and he suggested a motion be made to clarify the town charter on the question of if a mayor can vote for a vacancy. Gordon made a motion to interpret the charter to mean "council members whose offices are not vacant" be interpreted to mean council members only, not the mayor. The mayor would be entitled to vote only in the event of a tie. This clarification motion was voted on by the three council members and passed with Sticka voting no and Beard and Gordon voting yes. Gordon then made a second motion interpreting the charter to mean that the "entire council" means only council members and not the mayor, thus restricting the mayor's vote to only in the event of a tie. That motion also passed with the same council count. Kemp disagreed with the validity of both motions, saying it was not interpretation of the charter, but was actually changing it, which requires a vote of the people. At one point she threatened to leave the meeting but did not. Subsequently, after the clarification votes, the council voted one to two without the mayor's vote to appoint Thompson to the vacant position. He was later sworn in by town recorder Greisen. Later following the meeting, Kemp told the Gazette-Times she has contacted the Oregon Secretary of State "who advised me by phone that any actions by Curtis Thompson may not be legal." She said the Secretary of State also advised her to notify the state Ethics Commission. At the council meeting Kemp said she was also going back to the League of Oregon Cities for its opinion on the council actions. In other business the council discussed the number of late water bills there are in town. Kemp said there is currently \$1,200

cursed at city clerk Dawn Greisen on the phone after his water was earlier shut off for nonpayment. Thompson did not dispute the language he used, but in his defense said he was not given the required 72-hour notice before the shut off. Kemp said Thompson's behavior was the reason she had surveillance cameras installed in city hall. "The reason surveillance cameras with sound were installed in Lexington's Town Hall was that Curtis Thompson used inappropriate behavior, and was verbally abusive towards a town employee," Kemp said in a statement to the Gazette-Times. Thompson argued that he was just upset he was not given the 72 hours' notice, and just reacted as many people would. Council member Sticka said she was opposed to the appointment of Thompson because of the unpaid bills. "Why do we want someone on the council who won't pay his bills," she said. To bolster her argument she had a right to vote on the Thompson appointment, Mayor Kemp produced a letter at May's meeting from the League of Oregon Cities. Kemp had requested an opinion from the League about the dispute. The letter was from Special Council Paul Nolte, who concluded in part "that the vacancy can only be filled when a majority of the remaining council members, including the mayor, votes in the affirmative for the appointment." Although Nolte said the League of Oregon Cities does not act as legal counsel to individual cities, he based his opinion on his interpretation of the town charter. He said he reads the charter to say the filling of vacancies is made "by appointment by a majority of the entire council," and the "council consists of a mayor and four councilors." Gordon and Beard disagreed, saying there was sufficient "grey area" in the charter that it needed clarification. At last week's meeting Gordon said she

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Father Condon celebrates 64 years in priesthood

Father Condon celebrates 40 years in priesthood



Father Gerry Condon

By April Sykes The love of working with the homeless started a career in the priesthood that would span 40 years. And the caring this beloved parish priest invested over the years is returned by the parishioners in St. Patrick's and St. William's churches—indeed the whole community. The church and the communi-

ty helped Father Gerry Condon celebrate those 40 years with a party held June 17 at St. Patrick's. "I would never have believed it 40 years ago," says Father Condon of his lengthy career. Father Condon, born and raised in Dublin, Ireland, first decided to go into the priesthood after working with the homeless in Dublin. "I think that through that I thought it would be a good thing to bring the Gospel of the Lord to other people," he said. Following his work with the homeless, Father Condon attended Melleray College in County Waterford, majoring in religion. After graduation he went to seminary at St. Patrick's Seminary at Thurles in County Tipperary. At that time, many young men chose to go into the priesthood. Seminary at St. Patrick's was geared to ministering in other countries and two other students there at the time also planned to come to Eastern Oregon. Father Condon says that his mother accepted him traveling so far away because

so many young people emigrated from Ireland then. Father Condon contacted an organization in Chicago, the Catholic Church Extension Society, which helps to finance churches in very small areas and asked them to give him names of places that needed clergy. He received around a half dozen names and the first to answer him was the Bishop of Baker, Frances Leipzig, who said there was an opening in Baker. Father Condon was 28 years old when he arrived. He was never assigned to Baker though. His first assignment was at Lakeview on the California border. That parish took in the whole county and he and another priest served four churches, alternating time between them. After three years in the Lakeview Parish, Father Condon's Bishop had him on the road, pinch hitting at different places, the first of which was Heppner. Father Condon took over here while Father Gaire, Heppner's parish priest, returned to Ireland because his father was dying. Father Condon served in Heppner that time for 2 1/2 months. After his stint in Heppner, he went to St. Bridget's in Nyssa to cover for two priests who had gone to Mexico to study. From there he went to Redmond for three months. The priest there was sent on special assignment by the Bishop. After Redmond, Father Condon went to Condon and stayed there a year. Father Condon was then assigned to St. Mary's in the Wasco Parish. After nine years there, he was assigned to Merrill, which is on the California border south of Klamath Falls. He stayed there for four years. Then the bishop needed someone in Ontario. After eight years there, he transferred back to Lakeview as pastor and stayed there six years, before he moved to Prineville, where he remained for four years. During Father Condon's service in Prineville, he learned that one of his two sisters was diagnosed with cancer. He obtained a leave of absence and

traveled back to Ireland. His sister died a short time before he was to return to the U.S. Upon his return, he was assigned to Heppner. During his stay in Heppner Father Condon became eligible for a sabbatical, so he was able to return to Ireland for a while. After the sabbatical he decided to return to Heppner, where he has remained. He has been in Heppner for five years. Father Condon says that the sabbatical is a good thing and allows for contemplation about one's life and future decisions. Some people opt for retirement, but he says he just wasn't ready. Father Condon says that he has gotten "sufficient satisfaction" out of his career. Perhaps the greatest satisfaction, he says, was his involvement in organizing church renewal weekends. He was trained to coordinate the renewals and conducted a number of retreats at Ontario and several other parishes. This experience was all the more satisfying because he was able to work with the priest who had been involved in putting together the "marriage encounter" groups. "It was very rewarding," says Father Condon, "because it was so beneficial." Father Condon jokes that his greatest frustration is in learning to use the computer, but adds seriously that he found some of the changes brought on by the Second Vatican Council difficult to adjust. Changing the Mass from Latin to English was difficult, he says, as was the change in the structure of the church—he was accustomed to having his back to the people, in the capacity of a leader, but that was changed so that priests were to face their congregations to deliver the Mass. Father Condon sees the clergy's greatest challenge in stabilizing the family. "I see our families disintegrating," says Father Condon. "I think we have to have a strong family structure." He says that two of the biggest threats to the family are the economy, where both parents need to work and children are not cared for by family members, and divorce. "The children suffer the most," he says. Another aspect of concern is the school system. "The school system has become such that there is no moral instruction given in school."



Father Gerry Condon

Much beloved parish priest Father Gerry Condon is celebrating 64 years in the priesthood this year. To commemorate this auspicious year, the Gazette-Times is reprinting a story about him written in 1995.

Corps to hold Willow Creek Dam meeting

Health and Corps officials to answer public's questions



Dam safety, water quality, flood control and other topics to be discussed at town hall.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers invites members of the public to attend a town hall meeting about Willow Creek Dam, Thursday, June 27 in Heppner. The Corps will be joined by state and local officials from the Oregon Health Authority and Mor-

row County Health Department for a brief presentation, followed by questions from the public. Topics discussed at the meeting may include the history and purpose of Willow Creek Dam, recent inspections and dam safety, operations and maintenance

of the project, water quality, water management and flood control and recreation. The meeting will be held from 5 to 7 p.m. Thursday, June 27 at the Bartholomew Building, next to the courthouse at 110 North Court Street in Heppner.

Committee plans activities

The Community Pride subcommittee, now known as the Heppner Outreach Council, that was developed during the Heppner community meeting held last summer, has been meeting and working on activities and special events for the community. Events currently scheduled are Movies in the Park, showing Bumblebee at the

Heppner City Park on June 20 from 8-9:30 p.m., NERF War, with teens against the sheriff's department at the Heppner Library on June 27 from 6-7:30 p.m., Teen Week at the Heppner Library July 16-19 and Family Movie Night July 19 at 7 p.m. at the Episcopal Church Parish Hall. First Friday events will be held downtown Heppner

from 6-8 p.m. on July 5, August 2 and September 6. A Color Run is planned for August 24 at 10 a.m. and Lanterns on the Lake will be held Sept. 28 at 6 p.m. The Heppner Outreach Council will hold a meeting at the Heppner Chamber office on Monday, June 24 at 6 p.m. and everyone is invited to attend and become involved.

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Polaris Summer Sales Event advertisement featuring RZR, Ranger, and Sportsman vehicles. Includes text: 'REBATES UP TO \$2,000 + FINANCING AS LOW AS 3.99% APR FOR 36 MONTHS SAVE NOW!' and 'MORROW COUNTY GRAIN GROWERS 350 MAIN STREET, LEXINGTON OR CONTACT: JUSTIN BATTLE, 541-989-8221 EXT. 204'.