

~ Letters to the Editor ~

The Heppner Gazette Times will print all letters to the Editor with the following criteria met: letters submitted to the newspaper will need to have the name of the sender along with a legible signature. We are also requesting that you provide your address and a phone number where you can be reached. The address and phone number will only be used for verification and will not be printed in the newspaper. Letters may not be libelous. The GT reserves the right to edit. The GT is not responsible for accuracy of statements made in letters. Any letters expressing thanks will be placed in the classifieds under "Card of Thanks" at a cost of \$10.

Business receives violation letter from city manager

To the editor:

It has been a long time since I have attended a city council meeting. On July 8, I attended the meeting to address a letter that my son, Marty Brannon, had received from the city manager, Kraig Cutsforth regarding his business, Brannon's Auto Repairs. The letter states that his business is in violation of the Downtown District Zoning Ordinance, therefore Mr. Cutsforth's letter indicated that Marty needs to clean up his repair business on these premises or he could be fined \$435 per day. This business has operated as an automotive repair business since 1948.

Why is it now a violation of a city ordinance?

When Marty brought this letter up to the council for discussion, Mr. Cutsforth asked why Marty didn't walk across the street and discuss this situation with him instead of bringing it to the council. Marty countered to Mr. Cutsforth, "Why didn't you walk across the street and talk to me?" What I found so troubling was the whole council sat there with no communication or comments from any of its members. At elections I voted for several of these people and I felt they were not responding to the issue. (Marty has since been informed that the council did not know about the letter sent to him and Patterson's Auto Parts regarding this violation. Also, that the council was not aware of this ordinance).

Therefore, I now understand the lack of response from the council, but do not understand why Mr. Cutsforth feels he has the authority to send threatening communications to businesses without council approval. The business in question was built in 1948 to serve as an auto dealership and auto repair and should be allowed to

Planning commission to hold hearing

The next Morrow County Planning Commission public hearing will be held on July 30 in Heppner at the Bartholomew Building where they will consider a land partition to partition one parcel into three parcels for the purposes of estate planning. Following the hearing a joint work session with the Board of Commissioners will be held to review and discuss the Housing Strategies Report. This report evaluates the current state of housing in Morrow County and all five communities. It outlines current and future steps that can be taken to address needed housing in Morrow County.

At the Planning Commission meetings held in May and June there were

continue to do so.

Addressing the comments about complaints of the appearance of Brannon's Auto Repair, I agree that it needs to be cleaned up, however, Mr. Cutsforth used the wrong method to reach out to Marty, giving him just 15 days to get the cleanup done before enforcing the daily fine. Following a discussion at the meeting in regard to Marty starting the process of cleanup, Mr. Cutsforth said he would not enforce the penalty. Marty is in the process of getting this done.

I have several questions:

1. Who authorized the renovation of the Gilliam-Bisbee building without providing for parking? (Having worked in the G-B building for many years, county employees had to park in the Elks parking lot. So parking is not a new issue here.)
2. Is this whole issue because the renovation of the Gilliam-Bisbee building needs a parking lot?
3. Why was the council not aware of the letters being sent to businesses in Heppner by City Manager Kraig Cutsforth?
4. Why does City Manager Mr. Kraig Cutsforth, who has been on the job for a couple of months, just happen to find an ordinance that will benefit a renovation project that his sister Kim Cutsforth is the project manager?
5. Wasn't Kim Cutsforth the acting city manager when Kraig Cutsforth was hired to fill the city manager position?
6. Do we have a nepotism problem here?

I, along with many other citizens, am concerned regarding the direction our city is headed if this situation is any indication of our future.

Sincerely,
Arlatha Brannon
Heppner

approvals for three land partitions. Two of these land partitions also contained a replat.

Also during the months of May and June, Morrow County Planning Department staff issued eleven developmental approvals that will allow one new home, multiple shipping containers, tower upgrades, several grain bins, an addition to a house, a garage and a security building.

The Morrow County Planning Department encourages the public to visit our website for information on the Planning Commission, Code Enforcement, Transportation and much more. You can find the website at <https://www.co.morrow.or.us/planning>.

Where there's blame, there's enough to go around

To the editor:

Yep, me again. I'm beginning to long for the day when I will suddenly have nothing to write about. However, today is not that day, so buckle up buttercups. It's gonna be a bumpy ride.

Most of you are aware that Mayor Marcia Kemp closed the town of Lexington as of July 1, after a failed meeting to pass its budget for the 2019-20 fiscal year. The event has made newspapers across the state and even made a newspaper and TV station in Idaho. I know what you're thinking - What? How in the H-E-double hockey sticks? Mayor Kemp said she was told to notify the local papers.

Though I didn't see the coverage in all the papers, the article about the closure in the July 3 edition of the Heppner Gazette-Times was fair and balanced. The Eastern Oregonian, a little less so.

"Due to failure of Lexington council members not fulfilling their council duties by not attending the advertised budget hearing to approve the operating budget for 2019-2020, the town of Lexington is officially closed. The town's employees have been laid off. The state of Oregon has been contacted and is offering aid," Kemp said in an email to the Heppner Gazette-Times.

In the Eastern Oregonian, Kemp said "she doesn't know why three of the four city councilors failed to show up at a budget hearing scheduled for Thursday evening June 27) but their absence cost the city the quorum it needed to pass a budget."

First, in reply to her email to the G-T, I will simply reply with a magnificent quote by Simon Sinck: "Great leaders don't blame the tools they are given. They work to sharpen them." Translation for Ms. Kemp's benefit: Rather than blaming the council the voters gave you, how about working together as the team you were elected to be in order to be the sharpest tools for Lexington's progress, improvements and future?

Of the three who "failed" to show up at the meeting, Ms. Kemp did know why one of them, Bobbi Gordon, wasn't there as Ms. Gordon told Ms.

Repair facility still operates on property 75 years later

To the Editor:

My family came to Heppner in the mid 1950's. Farley Motors was an established auto repair and sales facility at 126 E. May Avenue in Heppner. Today, almost 75 years later, Marty Brannon owns and operates an ASE Certified repair facility on the property.

Marty has customers who come to him for their repairs from Portland, Spray, John Day, Condon, Hermiston and Umatilla as well as the Heppner area residents who rely on him to keep their vehicles running. When people from out of town come to him, they have nothing to do except walk around Heppner and purchase items from other businesses while they wait for their vehicle to be repaired. This is very good for other merchants in Heppner. Brannon Auto Repair has served over 3,000

Kemp at the June council meeting that she would not be able to attend due to a previously scheduled vacation. Of the two remaining council members who were there, Bill Beard and Curtis Thompson, there are a plethora of noteworthy points which did not make it into the mayor's press release, statements to the press and community. Incidentally, most of the following points were brought up to the mayor at the "emergency budget meeting turned community meeting" on Monday, July 8. Her responses are cited.

A. Mr. Thompson was only just sworn in, after a hotly contentious debate at the same meeting in which the budget hearing meeting so A) he would have no knowledge of the proposed budget and B) it's highly likely and understandable that he wouldn't have even heard the date the meeting was scheduled for.

B. Mayor Kemp failed to extend the courtesy of a phone call to either Mr. Thompson or Mr. Beard, who could and would have been there in less than five minutes with their apologies, thus avoiding all this drama and the town's closure. Furthermore, she failed, when Lexington fire chief Charlie Sumner asked her to call them, she refused. (At the July 8 meeting, she stated it was because she didn't have Mr. Beard's number, which is not only listed on the town's website, but posted on the front of the town hall building. Not to mention the Eastern Oregonian managed to obtain it.) Mr. Sumner then volunteered to call them himself. An offer flatly refused again by Ms. Kemp, which ushers in point C.

C. When asked at the July 8 meeting how long she waited for the councilors to show up before canceling the meeting, Mayor Kemp refused to answer. However, most of us already knew the answer... less than four minutes. She had adjourned the meeting, turned out the lights and locked up the building by 7:04 p.m. Heck, even most doctors give you a 15-minute window to be late and still be seen.

D. When asked why she closed the town without consulting her council, and more importantly, had

she had any communication with any of the three members since the closure, things became decidedly heated. In response to the first part of the question she said, "Because I was told to. I have the authority to and didn't need to consult them." The second and in my, and many others, opinion, more important part of the question, Ms. Kemp tried to avoid answering. After continued pressure and demands to answer the question if she had been in contact with any of the three councilors since the closure of the town, she finally admitted, "No! I haven't. OK?" No, Mayor Kemp, not OK. None of this is OK. In fact, she hadn't even notified them of the emergency budget meeting turned community meeting being held on July 8. They found out through the grapevine. Imagine the scenario if they hadn't found out and subsequently hadn't attended.

In short, rather than allowing a volunteer to make two quick courtesy phone calls, Ms. Kemp elected to throw three council members, two town employees and community members in Lexington under the bus. And why? To what end? What was she thinking she would possibly accomplish? How was this choice in any way in the best interest of, or service to, the Lexington community?

Moreover, at the July 8 meeting, with its rather large and amazing turnout (I wish that many would show interest in the regular council meetings), Ms. Kemp humbly sat at a small table on the floor with the rest of the gallery, while Ms. Gordon, Mr. Thompson and Mr. Beard chose their regular seats on the platform, front and center, quiet and at the ready for what they undoubtedly presumed would be a torrent of insults, blame bombs and scolding. Ms. Kemp stated, "This is a community meeting, not a council meeting, which is why I'm sitting down here and not up there with them. I could ask them to leave, but I won't." Um no, actually, you can't ask them to leave. The fact that they are town council members denotes definitively members of the community and thus entitled to be there.

Anyway, in reality, the anticipated torrent turned

out to be more of a sprinkle for the three on the platform with the majority of the scolding aimed at Ms. Kemp. She is the leader, is she not? It should also be mentioned for those of you who missed it, Mr. Beard published a public apology for his forgetfulness in the July 3 edition of the Gazette-Times, for which we thank him.

The point of all this is simple... This whole mess could and should have been avoided. Should the council members have remembered and attended the meeting? Of course, but they are human and made an honest mistake. Ms. Kemp's actions were deliberate. There's the distinction. None of these theatrics and histrionics have benefitted the town of Lexington. Quite the opposite. No budget, two employees out of work and the tax levy/town incorporation in jeopardy.

Not one member of the council nor the mayor put him or herself in those seats, the voters did (with the exception of Mr. Thompson.) It's long past time for Lexington's leaders to start acting and working like the team they were elected to be. So what if they don't like each other. That wasn't a consideration the voters were given. Perhaps if they took the time and respect to get to know one another that would change. So what if they have differing views and opinions? We all do, that's what makes us all the uniquely wonderful, messy humans we are. It should be embraced for the different talents and perspectives each brings to the table.

The longer the process of learning to value and respect one another takes, the slower the progress and longer the community of Lexington suffers.

In closing, I'd like to offer two quotes to motivate Mayor Kemp and her council: "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." Helen Keller. "The way the team plays as a whole determines the success." Babe Ruth.

I implore Mayor Kemp - choose success. Choose the community over personal feelings and issues. The results would be much more appreciated. And... I would have a lot less writer's cramp.

Cheyenne Rogers,
Heppner

downtown district we found out last week, but nothing is being done about that. It looks like Mr. Brannon is being targeted specifically. The betterment of our community should not involve running the only public auto repair business out of Heppner.

This entire situation should have been handled differently. It leaves me with several questions: 1. Is Brannon being targeted because he is located next to the new hotel? 2. When did these zoning changes take place and who was on the planning commission at the time? 3. Are we, the citizens of Heppner, supposed to have our vehicles towed to Hermiston every time we break down?

In conclusion: I believe Mr. Brannon is grandfathered in because the building, which I believe was

built in 1954, has always included a repair facility. I also believe he deserves an apology for the way this whole thing was handled. I greatly appreciate the fact that Marty Brannon works extremely hard to provide for the needs of Heppner residents and all others he serves. I also greatly appreciate the fact that we have a local weekly newspaper in this small community where we can voice our views when strongly moved.

I urge everyone who is a customer of Brannon's Auto Repair to attend the next city council meeting which is August 12 at 7 p.m. at city hall. If you cannot attend please send a representative to speak in your place.

Thank you,
Kathy Melby Turner
Heppner

Have a news story or photo for the Gazette? E-mail editor@rapidserve.net call 541-676-9228 or stop by the office on Willow St., Heppner Today