

Lexington council wraps up year with busy meeting

By Andrea Di Salvo

Fire calls were down but the number of stray cats is up, the Lexington Town Council learned at its December meeting last week.

Lexington Fire Department Chief Charlie Sumner and Assistant Fire Chief Josie Miles were at the Dec. 13 public meeting to give a report of the volunteer fire department's activities and progress during recent months. Miles reported a reduced number of fire calls in 2022 compared to 2021.

"We actually had a better fire season than we had anticipated compared to 2021," she said. "We were down about 30 percent fire responses, so we didn't have to go out as much, but we did have an increase in EMS (emergency Medical Services) calls. Especially in the last quarter, we've seen more of those in Lexington."

She added that a lot of the EMS calls weren't on her fire report, because she doesn't get that information unless they page out Lexington fire specifically; Lexington Quick Response Team (QRT) and EMS calls are funneled through Morrow County health District. Miles also reported that Lexington Fire is continuing wildland training courses with Adam McCabe at the

Lexington Fire Hall when schedules allow and that they are anticipating a HAZMAT (hazardous material) course to be available soon.

Sumner added that they are working on getting three of their firefighters through an ambulance training process with the health district so they can be paged out on ambulance calls.

"It's going, but it's not going as fast as we'd like," he said.

Three of the town's firefighters are continuing to work through the ambulance driving crew process.

The council was also presented with a record of the fire departments training and call for the year, along with requests for reimbursements totaling \$3,435 for all firefighting personnel. Aside from Sumner and Miles, other active fire volunteers are Reid Miller, Trent Miles and Shane Miles.

The council also learned that the fire department was working on a bid for the new fire hall bay door that will face F Street and that they hope to have the project completed before summer 2023.

Sumner also informed the council members that the Lexington department had been offered some old equipment free of charge from other area fire departments that were updating their equipment. On the list were bottles from East Umatilla Fire, as well as a fill station for bottles and some rescue equipment such as a Jaws of Life from Hermiston Fire. He said he wasn't sure if he would accept the offers.

Miles added that part of the debate was that Lexington Fire is a town department and wouldn't have use for the equipment unless they needed it inside town limits or they were called out on mutual aid by another department.

"However, if we have the equipment," she said, "we can be trained and be an available resource for it to be called out for mutual aid. The more that we are called out and the more records we have on our books, the better chances we have for continued grant funding."

"So there's some pros

and cons there as we consider those options," she added.

Also present at the meeting were Katie Siri-Murray, Executive Director of the Morrow County Unified Recreation District (MURD), and Cyde Estes, recreation district chairman, speaking to the Lexington Town Council about funding opportunities for the annual May Day celebration.

"Your May Day event is very interesting to us," said Estes, "because we fund events and entertainment everywhere in the county—except for in Lexington. We would love very much for you guys to put a proposal to us for what you would like us to fund."

MURD is a taxing district that covers the entire county. It has five board members, one each from Heppner, Ione, Irrigon and Boardman, and one at-large. The recreation district helps fund events like Lone Fourth of July and Heppner's St. Patrick's celebration. Estes said St. Patrick's gets around \$20,000 and Lone Fourth of July gets around \$18,000. "We have funds to help you put on whatever kind of event you'd like to do," she added.

The response from the Lexington council was positive. Lexington Mayor Juli Kennedy told the group that the May Day committee had met the night before to start planning for the 2023 event and had been discussing their "wish list" and the possibility of MURD funding.

Lexington Town Council Member Bobbi Gordon added, "Last night when we were meeting, everything we were bringing up we were like, 'Well, we can't afford that.'"

"I think we're in a better spot this year," Kennedy said. The council agreed to prepare a proposal to present to MURD before its next meeting in January. The next May Day celebration is May 6, 2023. The committee will hold monthly meetings the Monday before each town council meeting.

In other new business, Lexington Public Utilities Director Keith Hess reported that water testing results have been steadily clean. He had to make adjustments to the well to get the chlorine levels where they needed to be, but finally got that done.

"I'm finally seeing those chlorine levels up where we need them to be down in town, so that's good," he said.

Hess attended the council meeting via Zoom from an Oregon Association of

Water Utilities meeting Tuesday, where he said he was learning some good things.

"They brought up a really good point on asset management software. I think that's something we really need to look into acquiring. It'll just help us out all the way around," he said, and suggested looking into some different options and pricing so he could present it at a future meeting.

Gordon mentioned that they would need to check hardware requirements. "We have some old stuff here," she said.

Hess said he had listened to a representative from a company named Aktivov with software that was compatible with a lot of different platforms and that he would put together a packet for the council.

He also spoke to the council about an alert system for the well. He said FEMA wants some kind of automated alert system, but Lexington's doesn't work because it operates on line of sight.

"Whether we fix ours or get another one, that's something I'm definitely going to have to look into."

He also said he checked the town septic tanks and the fire hall's needs to be pumped, and mentioned that Windwave completed their fiberoptic installation and cut across F street. Now that the asphalt patch they put down has settled, he has noticed a little bit of a dip.

"So I'm probably going to be speaking to them about that to see if they can add some more asphalt to that to make it a little leveler," he said.

The council also discussed the recurring complaints about stray cats in Lexington. Lexington Town Recorder Veronica Hess said that previously a resident of Lexington apartments had been feeding stray cats and that there seems to be "an abundance of stray cats" now.

"There is a resident that is feeding them, there's no way about it, and there's no way that's going to stop," said Kennedy.

In the past, stray cats had been live trapped and the sheriff's office took them to Humane Society at a cost of \$10 for every cat. Town council member Bill Beard pointed out that a few residents' cats had also been caught in the previous sweep, which they didn't want to happen. Council member Katie Imes said she saw the population living mostly in the cars at the towing yard, and she thought it would be possible to home in on the stray population and avoid getting people's pets. "But it would

definitely be strategic," she added.

"It's going to take a little bit of live trapping again and talking to the people we know are feeding the cats outside," said Keith Hess.

Also at the meeting, Veronica Hess reported that she had a "pink slip" for a "new to us" fire truck that needs to be signed so the town can start the process of getting it into the Town of Lexington's name. She and Imes also had a meeting with a natural hazard mitigation planner in which they went over the 2016 list of action items and created a draft list of 2023 action items. The list of action items is required for future funding for FEMA grants, etc. Imes stressed that all the work is still in draft phase and would be presented to the council for input. The next meeting of the Morrow County Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan committee is in January, but Lexington will be hosting the meeting Feb. 21.

"It's nice to have some representation from Lexington participating on that committee, because otherwise it's just going to be presented and done," Imes said.

Gordon brought up that she thought the town needed to look into IT (internet technology) issues. She said the town recorder's desktop computer should have been rebuilt and updated once a year, but that computer has been in use for at least five years and has had nothing done to it. She also said that she talked to a business in Bend that does IT remotely. She wanted to look into individual emails for all employees and council members, as well as backing up the town's files remotely.

"I get really concerned about, if we lose our QuickBooks file, we are in a world of hurt," she said.

She said a backup server with two terabytes of hard drive and automated daily backup to the cloud would cost \$949.11 installed and set up. The company also quoted wiping and organization a computer at \$89 per hour and networking at \$129 an hour, "but we don't have any networking," she added.

She said a contract could also include a monthly fee for monitoring everything, which would be between \$100-\$200 per month.

She also said the town needs to make sure all town computers have hardware requirements for Windows 11 or above, since Microsoft will stop supporting Windows 10 next year. Gordon said she is sure

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Spiritually Speaking

Father Thankachan Joseph
St. Patrick Catholic Church Heppner



Christmas: Time to sing glory to God

Advent has been an intense preparation for the birth-day of Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem, which means "the house of bread," to become bread for all of us. He was a beautiful example to everyone. At the threshold of Christmas, are we ready to welcome Him into our homes and into our personal lives? As for yourself, "What else do I need to do to welcome Him into my individual life?"

The reading from Isaiah 9:1-6 begins like this: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light, upon those who dwell in the land of gloom a light has shone." On the first Sunday of Advent, we were reminded to "let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day..." (Rom. 13:12). From the time Abraham, our father in faith, was called by the Lord to set out, to go forth from his homeland to an unknown region that God would show him, our identity as believers has been that of a people making its pilgrim way towards the promised land. He accompanies us all through this life-journey. He is ever faithful to His covenant, though we are not. He accompanies our journey as "God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all" (1 Jn. 1:5). Yet people experience times of both light and darkness, fidelity and infidelity, obedience and rebellion; times of being a pilgrim people and times of being a people adrift.

If we love God and our brothers and sisters, we walk in the light; in contrast, if we keep our hearts closed, if we are dominated by pride, deceit, self-seeking, lust, drunkenness, rivalry, jealousy and envy, darkness falls within and around us. "Whoever hates his brother," writes the Apostle John, "is in the darkness; he walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has blinded his eyes" (1 Jn. 2:11). The Babe of Bethlehem comes as the source of grace and rays of love from the Heavenly Father, to take us to His abode.

The Gospel reading from Luke (2:1-14), speaks of the deeper meaning and purpose of Christ's birth. God became a baby, not a superman or an emperor, because Christmas is all about love. God gave Himself totally out of love for humanity. God sacrifices His own nature to become one like us, to make us understand the true meaning of love and that loving, giving, and sharing is not limited to the season of Christmas. All that is opposed to these and simplicity—namely selfishness, greed, anger, jealousy and pride—are the root causes for disharmony, conflict, hatred, violence and absence of peace (at the personal, social and global levels). Where there is genuine love and simplicity there is peace.

Christmas is a reminder for each of us that we are all the innkeepers who decide if there is some room for Jesus or not. The real meaning of Christmas is when we spiritually prepare ourselves to receive the Babe of Bethlehem in our hearts through the acts of sacrifices, mortifications and kindness. Christmas is not only putting up decorations in front of our houses, preparing a Christmas tree, and packing Christmas gifts under the Christmas tree. We need to make time for reaching out to others in their great need, to spend time with our aging parents and grandparents, to examine the real meaning of Christmas. Jesus was born in manger, but he became all things to all people and quenched their hunger for the divine. We can prepare a fabulous manger in our personal lives through works of kindness and sacrifices, and become all things to all people around us. That is the real meaning of Christmas I feel. So, we, too, join the angels of God to sing glories to God in the highest.

**Morrow County
North and South
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DECEMBER
24th and 25th
MERRY CHRISTMAS TO YOU ALL

**WE WISH ALL OF YOU A
Joyous Holiday Season
and a
Merry Christmas!**
Together, let's make 2023 a
year of Plentiful Harvests and
Thriving Community Growth.

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HEPPNER CHRISTIAN CHURCH
Christmas Eve Service
5PM - 293 GALE ST. HEPPNER