

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

People demonstrate no budget concerns

Are citizens really unhappy about the way tax money is spent in Columbia County, the Vernonia School District, the City of Vernonia or the county Education Service District?

With all the hue and cry about government spending, it was interesting to see how many citizens actually went to budget hearings to offer suggestions, ask for explanations or state their opinions *before* budgets were adopted for the next fiscal year.

Vernonia School District had a budget hearing. Total citizen participation: 0

City of Vernonia had a budget hearing. Total citizen participation: 1

Columbia Education Service District had a budget hearing. Total citizen participation: 0

Columbia County had *two* budget hearings, one in Vernonia and one in St. Helens. Total citizen participation: 0 (They quit holding budget hearings in Clatskanie, three years ago, because nobody ever showed up.).

Our local government systems provide for open communication between citizens and elected or appointed officials. If citizens can't spend an hour or two, once a year, to ask questions or make suggestions *before* budgets are adopted, why should they expect subsequent complaints to be taken seriously?

Schools must plan now for future needs

Vernonia School District 47J needs to, and wants to, make plans for population growth. The board and the administration are aware of the real estate boom in the area and its potential impact on the schools.

In addition to more students, they must also prepare for changes in the way children are taught and how that may affect school facilities.

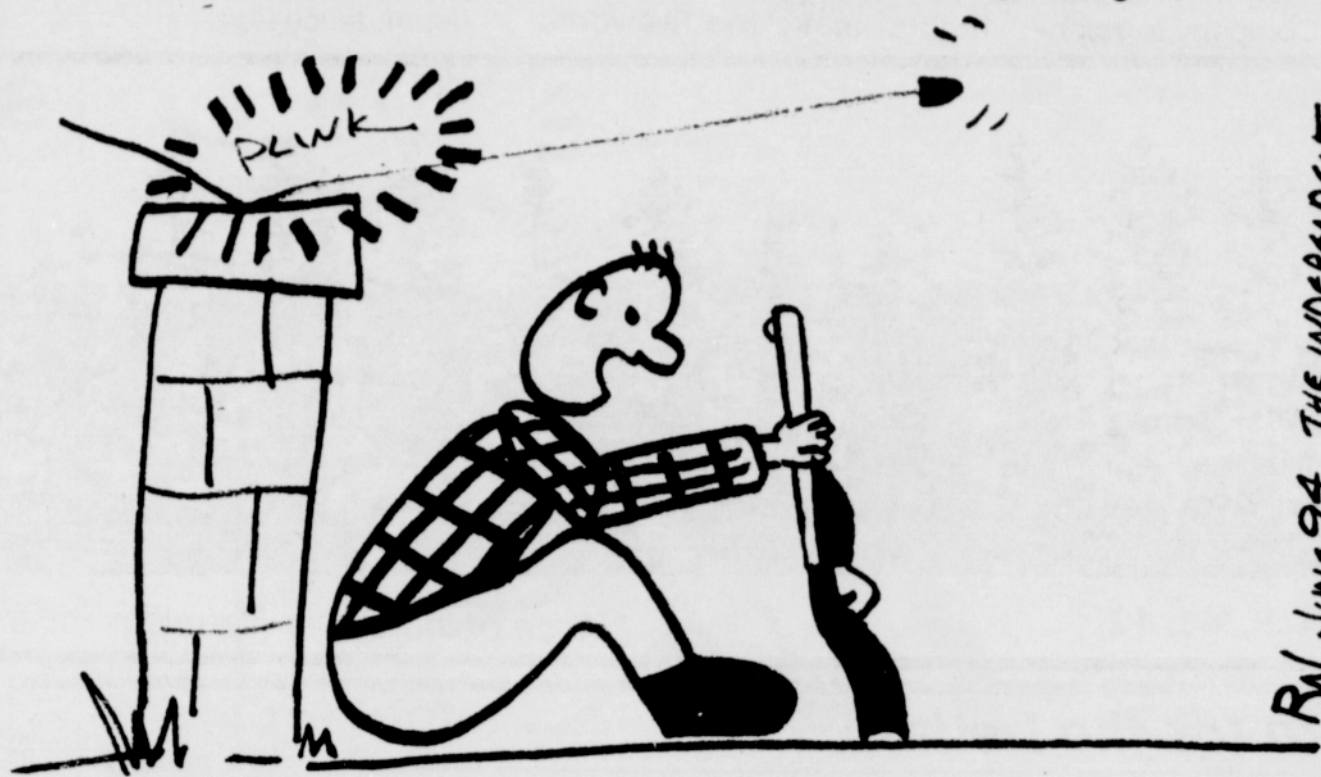
Community help is needed to plan for the many changes the district is facing. At this time, the district is seeking volunteers to serve on the facilities planning committee. Facilities planning means just what it says: What facilities will be needed to meet tomorrow's education needs?

There are many people who don't want to be involved in the numbers game on the budget committee or don't feel qualified to make recommendations as a curriculum committee member. But some of those same people may be great resources for the facilities planning committee.

Think about it. If you want to be involved in the future of education in Vernonia, but haven't found your niche, this may be it.

If you are interested in serving on that committee, call the school district office, 429-5891, and ask for an application. It won't hurt to inquire and this may be where you can make a contribution to the future of your community.

Just Think of it... ON D-DAY
I WAS AT NORMANDY DEFENDING
MY COUNTRY'S FREEDOM FROM
THE NAZI'S
WHO'D THINK THAT 50 YEARS
LATER I'D BE DEFENDING
MYSELF FROM GANGS!?



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M.A.D.D. membership drive underway

The annual membership drive of the Columbia County chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving is now underway. Chapter membership is the lifeline to the chapter, a spokesperson explained. In order to maintain active status as a chapter, there must be at least twenty members, some of whom can be non-dues-paying family members of drunk driving victims. All dues stay in Columbia County and are used for chapter projects.

Because of the small county population base, the local chapter receives most of its funding through the MADD State Organizing Committee.

During the past three years, the chapter has purchased video-camera units for five of the seven local law enforcement agencies. Two more cameras are in the 1994-1995 budget for Scappoose and Vernonia. The cameras provide a valuable tool in the identification and apprehension of impaired drivers. Included with each camera is an initial supply of video tapes.

Without the assistance of MADD, many local police agencies would not have the cameras because of tax limitations and budget cuts.

The chapter has also purchased portable breath testers for local school districts, upon request.

During the past year over 200 DUI offenders attend the monthly Victim Impact Panels. This is the fourth year for the program. Only nine of those who attended the first two presentations have re-offended.

Alcohol related fatalities appear to have gone down in Columbia County over the

past three years, especially among drivers under the age of twenty. Although there have been crashes resulting in injuries, the county has been fortunate that, according to Oregon state statistics, there have been no fatalities among teens for the past three years, but there have been fatalities for the group over age twenty.

The chapter monitor cases upon request, and is currently following a case involving an injured child who was riding with her father. It is also monitoring several cases that have been adjudicated, but are still having a direct impact on the victim families.

A limited supply of brochures is available on victims rights for DUI crashes and on choosing an attorney. Anyone needing a copy may call 397-6159 and it will be sent to you.

Several chapter members are active on the speaking circuit, addressing church groups, Granges, service clubs and school classes. Local members have also helped on Victim Impact Panels in Clatsop County and Cowlitz County (Washington).

Prevention continues to be the primary objective of the chapter. There is continual work with local schools by providing information, statistics, brochures and anything that may reach young people. It is not at all uncommon to have students call and need information for papers and speeches. This provides an

excellent opportunity to work one-on-one with teens. But it is an uphill battle to reach teens who are constantly affected by industry ads that glamorize alcohol, or whose peers and parents furnish alcohol to under-aged people.

Another public awareness campaign centers around the Holiday Red Ribbon distribution. This past year over 10,000 ribbons were given out across the county. Locally, the program needs to have someone in charge who can devote time to make contacts in the communities to get the ribbons out and on vehicles. If you can spare a few hours in the late fall and holiday season, please volunteer to help in your community. The ribbons are available, so all it would take is time to be sure your area has an adequate supply available for the public. In most areas, the time commitment is once or twice a week.

Though not always in the public eye, Columbia County MADD stays busy, with much of the work going on behind the scenes. Changing peoples' attitudes is difficult and involves long-term dedication by people who sincerely care. The chapter has no paid staff and no overhead costs.

There is more to be done, but it will take additional volunteers who are willing to work without a lot of personal recognition, just satisfaction for doing a valuable job. If you can help, call 397-6159 and join Mothers Against Drunk Drivers.

**Your voice is heard when you
speak from the ballot box.
Register to vote today.**