

# The INDEPENDENT

Serving the upper Nehalem River valley. Published twice monthly, on the first and third Wednesdays of each month, by Public Opinion Laboratory Ltd., 725 Bridge Street, Vernonia, OR 97064, as a free newspaper. Editors and Publishers, Dirk & Noni Andersen. Phone/Fax: (503) 429-9410.

## Opinion

### BoC started in right direction, but stopped

With very little advance notice, nearly 30 people turned out to talk with the Columbia County Board of Commissioners last Friday afternoon, Jan. 28.

In addition to making a pitch for the benefits of the linear trail extension, several of them wanted to talk about safety. To be more precise, they wanted to talk about the lack of safety on the path next to heavily traveled Hwy 47 between O-A Hill and Washington Grade School.

Through no fault of their own, Commissioners Jack Peterson and Rita Bernhard were unable to get to Vernonia in time for the meeting. They did finally arrive and, with Commissioner Tony Hyde and city administrator Mike Sykes, took a driving tour of the trail extension. They also looked at the path, but only from the comfort of a vehicle, they didn't walk it.

Before people left the aborted Friday meeting, Hyde said it would be re-set so people could talk with the commissioners. That would be the right thing to do.

By Monday, Jan. 31, when *The INDEPENDENT* asked Bernhard whether a date had been set, she said the commissioners would not re-set it. They had seen the project and didn't feel a need to talk with anybody. Are we surprised?

They don't want to hear from the students who were concerned enough to use their own time to attend a meeting on a sunny winter day when there was no school.

They don't want to hear from the mother whose young daughter is afraid to walk on the only path between the hill and the school.

They don't want to hear from the man whose vision is so limited that he can't drive, and needs a smooth, safe surface for walking.

They don't want to hear from the mother who can't use a stroller for her toddler because the path is too narrow.

They sure don't want to hear from the student who fell from that path.

The commissioners are focused only on the trail extension and refuse to look at the safety problems the trail can help mitigate.

Incidentally, Bernhard also said that, if we wanted to talk with a commissioner, we could call Hyde because he lives here. Perhaps it's time for him to step up to the place and insist on representation for everyone.

### Help Wanted - No Pay

The City of Vernonia is seeking applicants for a vacancy on the city Planning Commission.

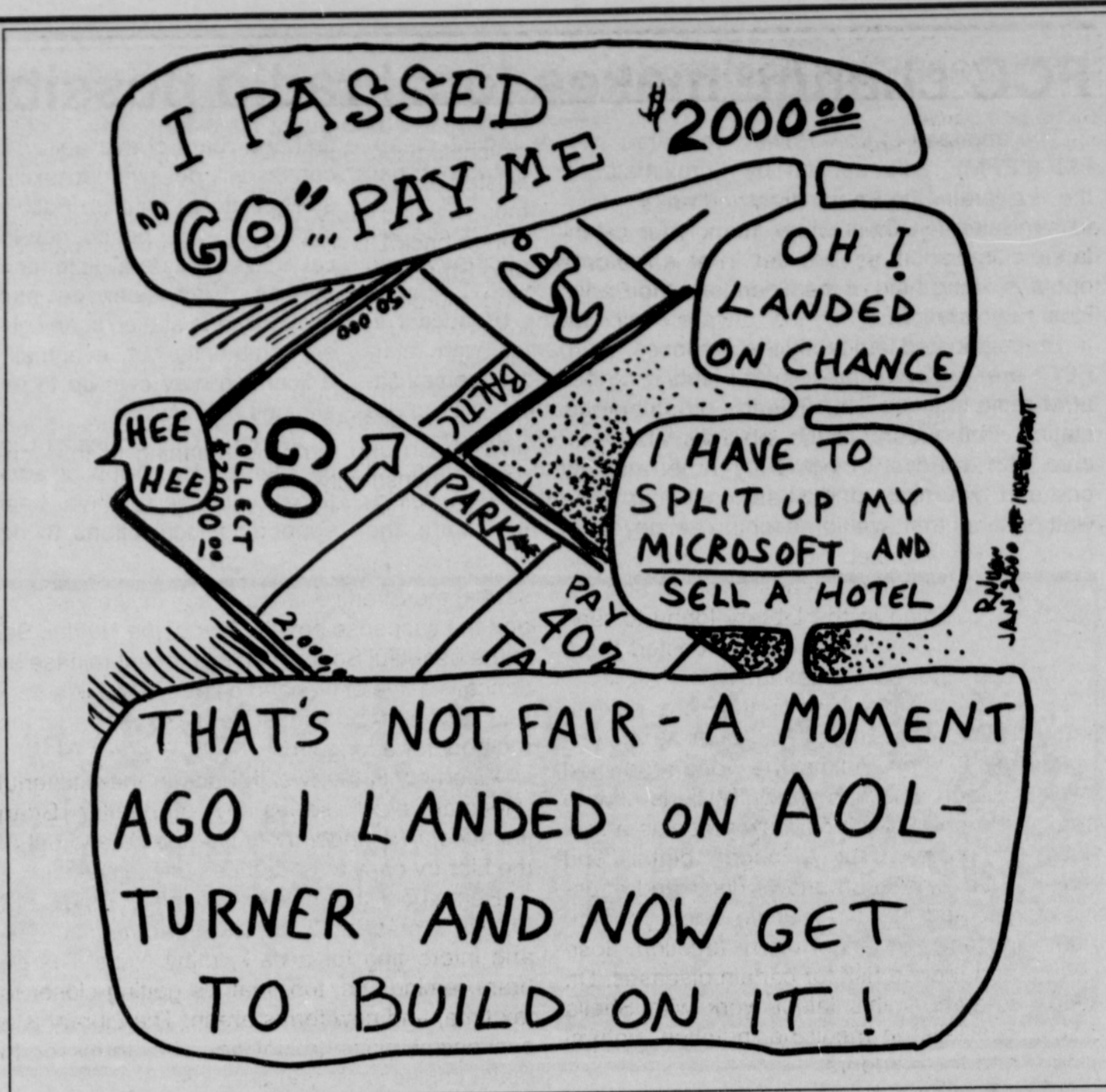
Before you stop reading, remember that the planning commission plays a key role in land use and in the development of ordinances. If you are interested in effective government, but don't know much about how it works, this is a great learning opportunity.

Anyone interested is asked to send a letter stating why you

are interested in the volunteer position, along with your qualifications and background, name, address and phone number.

The appointment will be made by Mayor Art Parrow, with the approval of the City Council.

Letters of interest should be sent to City of Vernonia, 1001 Bridge Street, Vernonia, OR 97064, Attn: Julie A. Coontz. Letters must be submitted no later than March 2, 2000.



### Ike Says...

By Dale Webb, member Izaak Walton League, Nehalem Valley Chapter

There is good news in our local watershed and beyond. Coho salmon numbers appear to be significantly up from past years. Even though the numbers are much improved, Coho salmon are not yet out of the woods. A couple of examples of the Coho rebound are the success in the Fishhawk Lake system, which saw Coho in Boxler Creek for the first time in years and three-fold survey counts in the Tillamook system. Boxler Creek just this summer had an impassable culvert removed and replaced by a railroad car bridge. While the actual number of Coho counted in Boxler Creek was around forty fish, the ramifications of these fish finding and using a stream that had been cut off to them for years is exciting. Also, counts at the fish ladder of fish moving over the structure indicated that well over 1,000 fish moved into the upper Fishhawk system between late October and the end of November. The project to replace the culvert was spearheaded by the Upper Nehalem Watershed Council, with help from Natural Resources Conservation Service and Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODF&W). Funding was provided by the Governor's Watershed Enhancement Board (GWEB) and the Oregon Wildlife Heritage Foundation. A great deal of time and effort was expended by Maggie Peyton, the Upper Nehalem Watershed Coordinator, and members of the Fishhawk Lake home owners association.

In talking with our District fish biologist, Keith Braun of Tillamook, he indicated that their peak survey counts had gone from 13 to 42 on an index scale used by the department. This news is very welcome in the Tillamook area, since their Coho runs have been pitiful when compared to the Nehalem runs. Neither river system, though, is anywhere close to historic levels that once saw over 200,000 Coho in the Nehalem alone. Population estimates were not yet available at press time.

Much of the credit for the turn-around lies with the renewal of upwelling and cooling of the Eastern Pacific (That's our side of the ocean.). It appears that the cool, wet cycle we may be heading into may be very favorable for Salmonids. Steelhead numbers are also showing good strength as preliminary numbers start coming in.

I guess I'm going to have to eat a little Crow for giving ODF&W such a hard time about having an ocean fishery for Coho. While I still do not believe that we should be fishing on a listed fish, it appears that the wild Coho runs were not significantly damaged by having an ocean fishery.

This is partly due to the fact that the ocean fishery did not meet its target on the number of fish caught, due to abnormal fish migrations and inclement weather conditions that hampered fishermen. I hope ODF&W will not rethink this conservative fishery and bump up the allocation numbers. We really need to capitalize on the increased returns that are now starting to show up. Let's get these fish off the ESA list.

Another bright spot may be the resumption of a consumptive trout fishery for Coastal Cutthroat Trout. A proposal that is supported by all the Coastal District fish biologists would allow a daily bag limit of two, eight inch or longer, fish in all Coastal waters that are now open to catch and release fishing. Again, this is just a proposal and will still have to be acted upon by the Commissioners before it would be effective in 2001. Current restrictions on tackle would still have to be in force, meaning artificial flies and lures would be the only tackle allowed in the Nehalem during this fishery.

Another success story is our Summer run of Chinook salmon. The Izaak Walton League conducts spawning counts of these fish in our local area. This year's counts, while being only 62 percent of the brood stock counts, still brings on a sigh of relief since those fish were the ones that had to endure the flood of '96. Two hundred and two fish were counted, collectively, by Maggie Peyton, Dennis Nelson and Don Webb on each of their survey routes. Many fish biologists, and I, were concerned that the flood of '96 might have decimated this year's class of fish, but it appears they were much tougher than thought. What is going to be interesting is next year's return on one of the largest returns we have recorded since we started surveying these fish. In the summer of '96, we had a record count of over 450 fish in our surveys. With improved ocean conditions, river conditions, and the new salmon treaty with Canada, we may have fish coming out our ears.

Steelhead fishing in the local area has been fair and if water conditions remain a lot better than in past years, fishing can be expected to pick up as we get into the more traditional timing of the wild run of fish.

There has been an interest expressed by some of the local fishermen to try and start a brood stock collection and rearing program, as is being done down on the Wilson River. If you are interested in such a program, please contact me or attend the next Izaak Walton League meeting on Feb. 17. The meeting will be held at my home unless a lot of interest is generated and space

Please see page 3