

Citizens, news groups oppose new DEQ rules

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is proposing new rules which would substantially restrict public access to public records dealing with agency decision-making and make agency contested case proceedings secret at the option of DEQ or parties they are dealing with, according to testimony of representatives of public interest groups and the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association.

Testifying at a DEQ hearing

on May 22, the opponents said major changes in the rules could have the following impact:

- Requests to see or copy public records would have to go to the individual DEQ staffer with the records. If that person is unavailable, even for vacation or medical leave, DEQ could refuse access until the staffer returns.

- The rule changes would permit the agency to delay public access indefinitely

based on "staff availability" or other factors.

- Any request that results in more than 15 minutes of staff time may be billed to the requesting party at \$30 per hour, or \$40 per hour if the document is available only on disk. These charges do not include the additional 25¢ per page for copying, nor the cost of the computer disk. If the agency is unable to locate the document, the requester could be billed for the time required to find it.

- If DEQ thinks the document or file may include material that DEQ isn't required to provide under the Public Records Act, it may send the document or file to the Attorney General's office and bill the requester for the time the AG takes to review it at \$90 per hour. This would be in addition to charges for staff time and copying at DEQ.

- The proposed rules provide that "any participant" can

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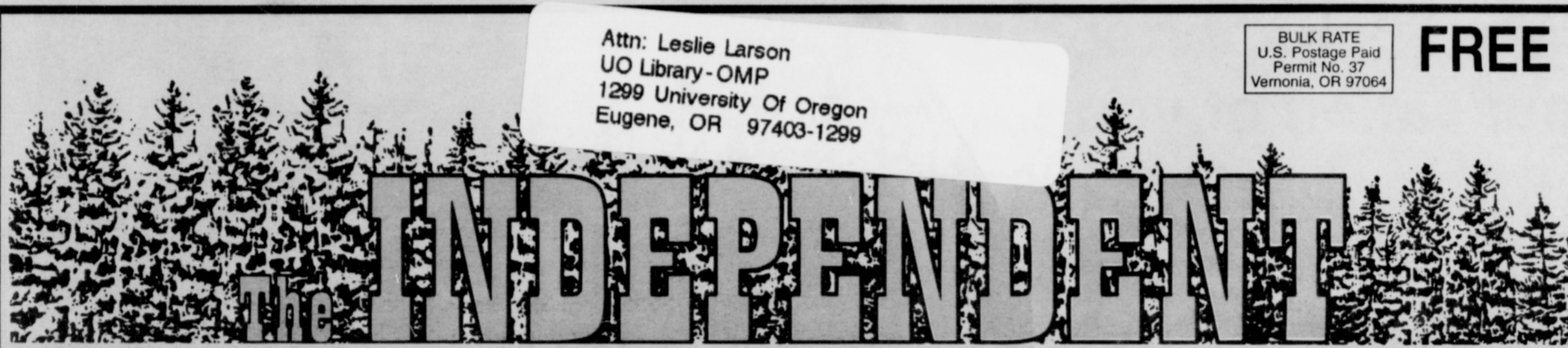
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A stroll in the park?



The Oregon Parks & Recreation Commission took a quick look at the proposed extension of the Banks-Vernonia Linear Park, from Anderson Park to Vernonia Lake, during an unscheduled detour while visiting Columbia County. Visitors included Commission Chair Betsy McCool, Commissioners Sara Vickerman and June Spence, Mike Carrier, the new state director of parks, plus Acting Director Laurie Warner. Additional parks department staff on the tour were park operations manager Tim Wood, Area 1 manager Jack Wiles, and business services manager Dave Wright.

Columbia County Commissioner Tony Hyde arranged the unscheduled visit. Included in the tour were Washington County Facilities Manager Larry Eisenberger, Susie Jordan and Judie James, both of the state Legislative Fiscal Office, and Harold Beisle from the Oregon office of the federal Bureau of Land Management.

Tight school budget will force changes

Vernonia Schools District has managed to ride out the financial crunch created by tax-cutting ballot measures and a stingy legislature—until now. Available funds for the fiscal year 2000-2001 will not stretch to meet all of the needs, even with fewer staff members, both certified and classified.

A shortage of funds creates the following problems at the high school level:

- The district must follow a state mandate and buy new language arts textbooks for grades 9-12 this year. The \$7,650 allocated will purchase enough of the new textbooks for each incoming freshman, but not for all students in grades 10-12. Students in those grades will be able to use the textbooks only in the classroom; they will not be able to take the books home because there won't be enough books.

- The district music program, which has grown rapidly in recent years, in both numbers and quality, will increase by at least 50 percent at the high school level. The proposed budget has an increase of \$2,512, from \$21,355 to \$23,867. The district hasn't purchased instruments for eight years so most students must rent or buy their own.

- The science program will be reduced by nearly \$7,000.

- Drama is effectively eliminated, with \$2,032 proposed to

produce one play.

- Social Studies will be reduced by \$20,000, but that figure is somewhat misleading because \$10,000 went to textbooks this year. Nevertheless the actual reduction is approximately \$10,000.

In other 9-12 programs, there will be some major reductions as the result of personnel changes, but overall, the picture is grim.

One area that hasn't been cut, is extracurricular sports, with a proposed increase of \$6,770, most of which will go for new girls' basketball uniforms. The current budget is for \$116,343.

But the budget crunch may affect student participation in extracurricular sports if the district's board of directors approves a "pay-for-play" proposal that will be discussed at tomorrow night's board meeting.

The proposed budget includes revenues of approximately \$16,000 from student fees and athletic event gate receipts. If this is approved, it would be the first time Vernonia students have been required to pay a fee for participation in sports.

One undetermined element of the proposed budget is compensation for district personnel. The district is currently negotiating with unions representing both certified and classified personnel.

Change may extend commercial zone

The Vernonia City Council has scheduled a public hearing to consider a zone change on the north side of Bridge Street from Washington Avenue to, and including, Vernonia Auto Parts. The area is currently zoned general residential and is proposed for commercial zoning.

Property owners have indicated approval of the change but want more information on potential tax impacts. The hearing is set for July 24 at 6:00 p.m.

Gwin and Sons Logging was awarded the contract to thin trees at Ora Bolmeier Park and Airport Park. The city plans to remove Douglas fir in Ora Bolmeier Park and replant with other species that are better suited to park use. Sequoia trees and other species are under consideration.

The white fir trees in Airport Park are all dying, public works director Robyn Bassett reported, a result of the 1996 flood. They have no timber value and must be removed before they

become hazards, Bassett explained. The city anticipates no profit from the thinning project and expects it to bring in only enough to pay the contractor.

City Administrator Mike Sykes informed the council that he and representatives of Columbia County Public Health and Columbia Community Mental Health been discussing possible use of space in the old city hall in order to provide more services in Vernonia. The council directed him to continue discussions.

Burge, Corsiglia win nominations

The race for Columbia County Commissioner, Position 1, stayed close throughout the count, but the preliminary figures held steady.

Winning the Republican nomination was Scott Burge of Scappoose, with 1,711 votes, just 43 more than his oppo-

nent, Colleen DeShazer of Warren.

Joe Corsiglia, of St. Helens, held onto his lead on the Democratic ballot, finishing with 1,747 votes. Mike Avent, of Rainier, had 1,685, and Warren resident Carole Smith was close behind with 1,645 votes.