

Water, energy conservation top Council concerns

Following a Town Hall meeting on June 25, Vernonia City Council approved a special residential summer water rate schedule at their July 2 meeting and is actively pursuing a strategy to reduce the city's electric usage.

The city's goals, explained Director of Public Works Robyn Bassett at the town hall meeting, are to eliminate wasted energy and utilize resources in a cost-effective manner.

While the city may get

through this dry year without difficulty, increased water consumption during the summer also requires increased electricity to process the water. If the usual seasonal increase in consumption can be averted, water and electricity will both be conserved and costs will be reduced.

Public comments at the town hall included the following:

- Let lawns dry out when the weather is hot and dry because

they'll turn green again when it rains.

- Water flowers with a container instead of with a sprinkler.

- Eliminate car wash fund raisers this summer.

- Praise for Vernonia Pride's decision to use imitation flowers in public areas this year.

- Ask the Fire District to limit volunteers' use of water to wash their personal vehicles.

A suggestion was made that citizens who greatly reduce

water consumption be commended, and a concern expressed that the city's actions should be more aggressive.

The summer water rate schedule applies to residential users only, from July 1 to Sept. 30. The summer rates leaves the basic monthly charge of \$28.00 for the first 2,000 gallons of water used, but limits the \$1.25 charge for each additional 1,000 gallons of water to a maximum of 1,000 gallons. A

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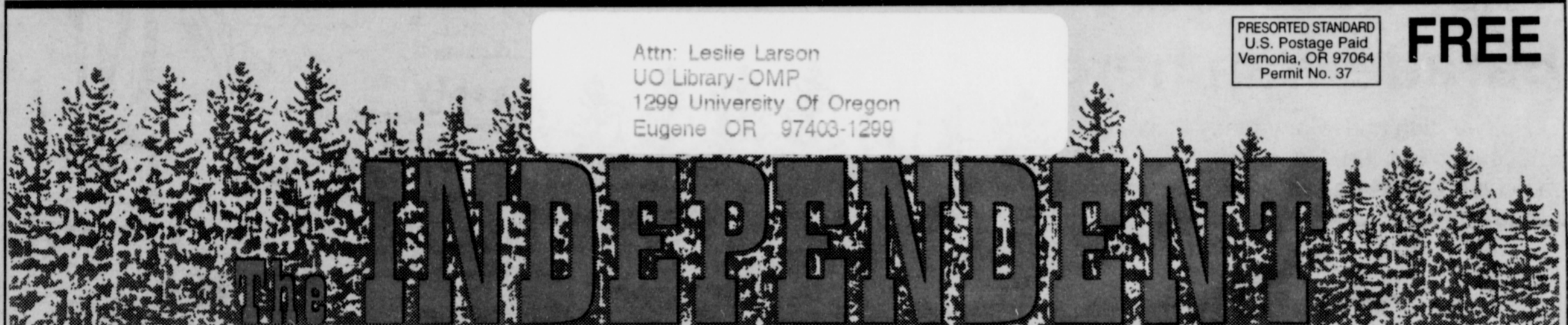
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"Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley"

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Summer has arrived...



The cooling waters of Vernonia's Rock Creek swimming pool were made even more enticing by a few days of warm weather.

Board will seek \$14.9 million school bond

A recommendation to replace Vernonia's crowded and deteriorating schools, was adopted by the Vernonia School District Board of Directors at their special June 28 meeting, setting the stage for voters to decide in November whether they will support a \$14.9 million bond issue.

On behalf of the district's Long Range Facilities Committee, Dave Soderstrom, of Soderstrom Architects, presented the innovative proposal — which eliminates the need to purchase additional property — to the school board at their June 7 meeting.

Appointed by the school board in February, the committee was composed of chairman Dan Brown, other community members Randy Aultman, Rebecca Brookins, Chris Cota, Michelle Gilbertson, Rick Gwin, Ralph Keasey, Jim King, Steve Landers, Kari Moeller, Jim Prpich, Jacqueline Ramsay and Janelle Serafin, board members Jeff Blum and Tim Titus, district personnel Jane McClellan, Larry McClellan, Kirk Sherrill and David VanMeter. The committee's task was to review the current status of the district's buildings and develop a recommendation for long range planning.

Previous plan reviewed

After reviewing a facilities plan that was completed just before the flood in 1996, the committee divided into work groups to study five areas of concern—available/possible sites, educational programming and grade level alignment, economics and bond costs, marketing and selling strategies, administrative and legal considerations.

At about the same time, in order to get some idea of community attitudes on school fa-

ilities, a questionnaire was sent home with students and was also available in a few places around the district. Returns showed an overwhelming concern for safety, with 84 percent of respondents listing it as the primary objective. More than 50 percent also expressed support for new school and athletic facilities.

Regarding how age/grade levels should be divided (grade level alignment), respondents clearly preferred a configuration that would place kindergarten through fifth grades, sixth through eighth grades, and ninth through twelfth grades in separate buildings.

Seventy-six percent of those who returned the survey indicated a willingness to support a tax increase for improved school facilities. Seventy-three percent of respondents were parents of current students.

Safety becomes focus

Meanwhile, engineers surveyed the structural, electrical and mechanical condition, as well as ADA accessibility, at Washington Grade School and Vernonia High School. The engineering report revealed the need for major repairs and upgrades in all areas in both schools. Mist and Lincoln schools were rejected by the committee early in the process as inadequate for the educational program.

Although the district has done only minor additions and remodeling since the last school building was constructed in 1950, the committee expressed concern that the community was generally unaware of the buildings' deficiencies. Remodeling performed after the flood was limited by FEMA regulations to replacing what existed prior to the flood. Be-

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Fire Season restrictions now in place

Fire season went into effect at 12:01 a.m. on Monday, July 2 in Northwest Oregon. This includes private, state, county and BLM forest lands protected by the Oregon Department of Forestry in Washington, Mult-

nomah, Tillamook, Yamhill, Columbia and Clatsop counties.

According to Mike Simek, Protection Unit Forester at Columbia City, woods workers are required to have fire prevention and fire fighting equipment at

their operation site and provide a watchman on each operation after equipment is shut down.

Fire season rules also prohibit smoking while in or traveling through any "operation area," and prohibit the use of fuses and caps for blasting on forest land. In addition, all debris burning sites and burn barrels must be inspected and approved with a written permit prior to any burning.

Fire season is declared each year based on weather conditions and fire danger. As forest vegetation dries due to warmer temperatures and less rain, fire danger increases. Extra precautions need to be taken by forest users and forest workers to prevent fires from starting, Simek explained.

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Vernonia man killed in car wreck

Robbie Baska, a 22 year-old Vernonia man, was killed in a single vehicle accident shortly before midnight June 30.

According to Sandy James, Washington County Sheriff's Office spokeswoman, Baska was in the front passenger seat of a car that went off the right shoulder of Highway 47 south of Top Hill, landing about ten feet down. Baska, who was not wearing a seat belt, died of head injuries when the car's roof was crushed.

The car's driver, 21 year-old Dustin Kofstad, also of Vernonia, was taken to Emanuel Hospital with minor injuries and released the following day. He was wearing a seat belt.

Kofstad's blood-alcohol was measured at 0.18, according to Sgt. Marlene Gaskins of the sheriff's office, more than twice the legal limit of .08. Investigations are underway by both the sheriff's office and the Washington County District Attorney's office.