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The INDEPENDENT

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"Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley"

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Expensive vandalism...



Vandals caused such extensive damage to the pump at Vernonia Lake that it required nearly two days to repair. The hose that carried water from the Nehalem River to the lake was slashed so thoroughly that it was replaced with a hard pipe. The public works crew made other modifications, as well, to make the pump less accessible.

Education funds being closely watched

By Noni Andersen

As the state's economic condition continues its downward slide, a need for new textbooks is just one of the situations being monitored by a subcommittee of the Vernonia School District budget committee.

In an effort to stay aware of changes in the revenue picture, Leslie O'Leary, Cari Levenseller, Cindy Naillon, Robyn Bassett and I meet monthly at 7:00 a.m. with administrative team members Mike Funderburg, Dawn Plews, Kirk Sherrill and Mike Durbin.

The meetings are not fun. In January, if voters say no to a temporary income tax increase, Vernonia schools will be look-

ing at a decrease of \$140,000 – money that is already budgeted. The group is now looking, very reluctantly, at cutting teaching positions because approximately 80 percent of the general fund is in salaries.

If necessary, the district will have to consider closing two Mist School classrooms, and moving one teacher from Mist to Washington Grade School in order to eliminate busing students to Mist. The state reimburses 70 percent of the transportation cost, but the other 30 percent may be needed.

Another undesirable alternative would be to eliminate one teaching position by creating a blended classroom at Lincoln

Grade School. The "worst case" scenario would include selling the Mist property.

The budget monitoring will continue, no matter what the outcome, because in about three months, the full budget committee will have to start work on the 2003-04 budget. Everyone involved hopes that the economy starts to turn around by that time, but no one is holding their breath.

Volunteer firefighters needed, ideas wanted for workshop

As recent incidents have shown, there is a critical shortage of volunteer firefighters in Vernonia who are available to respond to emergencies during normal, daytime working hours.

City sets hearing on proposed park fees

The good news is: Vernonia's parks are much loved and much used.

The bad news is: Parks cost money to maintain and they don't pay for themselves.

Therefore, the question before the Vernonia City Council is: How can the City maintain and improve parks without developing a funding source?

The sticker fee developed last year for vehicles entering Vernonia Lake was partially successful, but the program couldn't raise enough money to be of much help.

Volunteers on the city Parks Commission have been studying the situation for over a year and, after many meetings and several workshops – including some with the council – have developed a fee schedule, park user regulations and management responsibilities for all of the parks.

Users may make reservations for park facilities and sports fields, with varying fees, depending on the facilities reserved, what activities are scheduled and the users' classification. Three classes of users have been identified:

Class 1 is for activities sponsored by the City of Vernonia.

Class 2 is composed of non-profit organizations sponsoring an activity, or activities, for the primary purpose of serving the educational or recreational needs of youth in Vernonia.

Class 3 is all other groups (including religious and political),

organizations and individuals.

Under the proposed regulations, for example, if the City of Vernonia sponsored a potluck workshop in the Anderson Park Picnic Shelter (as they have done in the past), there would be no fee. There would be no fee for the Vernonia Summer Youth program, a Class 2 organization, to schedule a potluck and registration in the same facility. However, if a political organization wanted to reserve the picnic shelter for a fund raiser or an informational meeting, they would have to pay a \$30 fee.

Group camping, whether RV or tent, would always require a fee for both Class 2 and Class 3, but the amount would vary. A group camp is defined as five to ten RVs or tents per night.

"Expectations are high," for Vernonia's parks, said Public Works Director Robyn Bassett, "but the grants are gone."

Vernonia has been fortunate in being allowed to use "in-kind" contributions, Bassett said, as matching "money" for grants. However, maintenance and improvements in the future will require actual cash to meet grant requirements.

Everyone interested in the future of Anderson Park, Vernonia Lake, Hawkins Park, Spencer Field, Airport Park and Ora Bolmeier Park is invited to attend the public hearing on December 2 at 6:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers at Vernonia City Hall.

In an effort to alleviate the problem, the Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District has scheduled a workshop to discuss ways to recruit and train more people.

All ideas and suggestions will be considered and the public is urged to attend. The workshop will be on Tuesday, November 26 at 7:00 p.m., in the fire hall, 555 E. Bridge Street.