

The INDEPENDENT

Vol. 19, No. 20

"Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley"

October 21, 2004

Waiting...



This line-up for flu shots is unfortunately typical of what is happening throughout the nation. At this time, it appears there will be no flu vaccine available in the Nehalem valley.

47J meetings feature "flexible" dates, times

Vernonia's school board, with regular meetings scheduled for the second Thursday of each month at 6:00 p.m., is continuing flexible meeting times by changing dates and times to maximize board attendance. The October meeting was changed from October 14 to October 12 at the request of Chairman Jim Krahn, who couldn't attend on the 14th. The September meeting was held one week later than scheduled.

requests for proposals for construction will probably go out in December with contracts to be completed in January.

Communications

Menu choices and event calendars are sent home with students each month, Funderburg told the board, and by reducing the size of these, so both can be placed on one page, the remaining side is available for other information. That space will be used for the new "47J Update," with an administrator writing a commentary each month. In the first issue, Funderburg used the space to outline "some of the things we can and must change," introduce new staff members, and discuss the new facility.

Tree removal

Responding to a question about who would be removing trees from the playground and how the income would be spent, board member Randy Hansen said that he is working with Mike Pihl and Mike Fudge to remove "risk trees" during the Thanksgiving break. He said the money would be spent at the discretion of the board. Funderburg explained that any revenue received would go to the general fund unless the board designates otherwise, and Krahn added that [the board] was happy to take suggestions. Funderburg said that spending some of it for fencing might be appropriate.

Student updates

Natalie Rombach, high school representative to the board, reported that students are keeping the weight room cleaner and safer. She said that colors and themes for homecoming have been selected and that a committee has

Since the August meeting, when it was difficult to obtain a quorum, Krahn has asked board members to notify him if they know in advance they will be unable to attend a meeting, and emphasized that the board can be flexible with meeting dates.

The starting time of the November meeting, which was already changed to the third Thursday instead of the second Thursday because of Veteran's Day, was further modified with a 5:00 p.m. starting time after teacher Joanie Jones pointed out that there would be a conflict with parent/teacher conferences.

Building progress

Superintendent Mike Funderburg reported that surveying has started, and test holes will soon be dug to determine the amount of fill and compaction needed for the new middle school facility. The project has also been downsized because the one million dollars the district is borrowing for the project is no longer adequate, due to an extended design period, increased material costs and difficulty in obtaining permits. Moving bus access from the back of the building to the front has also been delayed. Funderburg told the board that

Urban renewal is topic of discussion

Prior to the October 18 City Council meeting, the city hosted a panel discussion on Urban Renewal Districts (URD). The panel included URD consultant

Jeff Tashman, a URD consultant/attorney Jeanette Launer, County Commissioner Tony Hyde, Terry Grice from the Rainier URD, and City Manager Bruce Cleeten, of Harrisburg, which has a URD.

While describing the potential benefits of an Urban Renewal District, the panel made clear that there are many elements to be carefully considered. There are also state ordinances that strictly govern what URDs can, and can't, do.

Even then, once a city decides to pursue this approach, citizen involvement is needed, and boundaries must be determined. Feasibility and tax rate studies are required to determine the cost of desired projects, the projected revenues, and the amount of indebtedness the URD can take on.

After all approvals, taxes in the district are frozen. From then on, until the indebtedness is retired, any increase in property taxes that results from increases in the URD's assessed value is used to fund and pay off loans used for the projects.

The trade-offs in URDs are

that the city and fire district will not see an increase in tax revenue until the URD pays all debts and the taxes go back to regular channels.

The governing body of the URD can be the city council, an appointed board, or an elected board.

Over 70 URD plans are currently operating in Oregon and when they are properly designed, the panel made clear, can be a very good tool for funding community projects.

A feasibility study for a community the size of Vernonia would cost \$5-\$7,000 and a full study plus a plan could cost \$25-30,000.

If the city decides to pursue this approach, they will hold more public meetings to determine what might be included in a URD plan.

**Candidate Forum
for Mayor &
City Council
Thursday, Oct. 28
7:00 p.m.
Vernonia City Hall**

WOEC proposes 8% average increase

West Oregon Electric Cooperative will hold a rate hearing on Wednesday, October 27, at 7:00 p.m. at the Scout Cabin in Vernonia, to discuss a proposed rate increase averaging eight percent, which would begin January 1, 2005.

The co-op's bylaws require a hearing before rates can be changed.

Reasons given for the rate increase include power costs that are more than 40 percent higher than in 2001, BPA raising wholesale power supply rates by 6.5 percent, and that the cooperative must demonstrate that it can meet its obligations without using cash reserves. Additionally, WOEC says that operational costs are increasing and new EPA requirements will impact the budget.