

The INDEPENDENT

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"Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley"

May 3, 2007

Don't Drink and Drive...



Emergency personnel free driver of one car from wreck. See page 24 for complete story.

City administrator seemingly reluctant to answer questions

The Independent, in an effort to provide the community with information on the city's financial shape in light of the \$374,000+ deficit in the Economic Development Fund of the 2006-2007 budget, has been asking questions of Vernonia City Administrator, M.R. "Dick" Kline. When Kline indicated an inability to understand our questions, when presented verbally, *The Independent* presented them in writing. Here are the questions and his answers, verbatim. Editor's Notes add information that was not in the original letter. Kline's answers are shown in italics:

1. Which part of the \$374,000+ shortfall in the Community Development Fund can be attributed to; Vernonia Community Learning Center; OA Hill Bike/Ped project, Other (please specify project and dollar amount).

A recap of the shortfalls and cash flow problems in the Community Development Fund will be an important part of the budget presentation this year. Detailed answers to project shortfalls will be available starting next week.

2. Is there a business plan (or plan for being self-supporting) for the Vernonia Community Learning Center? [Editor's Note: When asked this question verbally at a meeting a few weeks ago, Kline answered, "No, there is no money in the budget for a business plan".]

There is a business plan for the Learning Center that was drafted by Jesse Jones as a requirement of the CDBG process. This plan will be modified/updated periodically to reflect new opportunities available to the center.

3. When is the Learning Center expected to be self-sup-

porting?

It looks like the Learning Center may be self sufficient next fiscal year. Again, until we go through the budget process it is too early to say definitively.

4. Is the Learning Center currently bringing in enough money to pay; the loan payments on the \$25,000 loan? the contract employee (Jesse Jones) contract amount of \$1,541.67?

The Learning Center budget reflects a transfer from the General Fund this year. Therefore, regular center operations are not generating a positive cash flow so far this budget year. Revenues have been increasing at the center, and as stated previously, the center may break even as early as next year.

5. Is it true that the Learning Center Director position will be a city employee (rather than a contract service) starting July 1, 2007? If so, at what salary?

Next year's budget shows the Director position to be staffed by a contract service employee. If the City determines it is in the best interests of the City to staff the position with a city employee, a job description will be drafted, it will be presented to Council for approval, and the necessary budget resolution will be deliberated and adopted at a regular City Council meeting.

6. Please indicate the "dire financial situation" the city is in (per your previous remarks). [Editor's Note: Kline's previous remark, made verbally, was "The citizens don't know the dire financial situation the city is in."]

I don't know what you mean by "indicate the dire financial situation the City is in". A com-

Please see page 4

Bassett suit for "emotional distress" seeks \$400,000

A lawsuit filed April 13, by former city administrator Robyn Bassett, names the City of Vernonia and Sally Harrison, individually and in her official capacity as Mayor, as defendants.

Bassett is asking for a total of \$400,000 for economic loss and emotional distress and injury to reputation. Bassett was Vernonia Public Works Director until being employed as City Administrator from February, 2005, until she resigned on or

about June 18, 2006 (according to the lawsuit).

The basis of the lawsuit is the claim that Harrison told Bassett she could resume the position of Public Works Director if she would resign as city administrator but that, when she did resign, Harrison and the city council refused to reinstate her to the position of Public Works Director.

The City of Vernonia had not made any response to the lawsuit as of April 27.

May named Older Americans Month

On May 1, Vernonia Mayor Sally Harrison proclaimed May to be Older Americans Month and she urged all citizens to honor older adults, and those who care for them, during May and throughout the year.

Fifteen-percent of citizens in the Vernonia area are 60 years of age or older and make up a

diverse group who continue to contribute to our nation's social and economic well-being.

Mayor Harrison went on to urge everyone to promote and participate in activities that contribute to helping older Americans make choices for a healthy and rewarding future.

Vernonia residents may utilize free health screenings

Free health screenings will be offered at the Vernonia School District parking lot on Saturday, May 12, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

A mobile unit will provide screenings for vision, hearing, diabetes (fast for three hours prior to diabetes testing), glaucoma, and blood pressure. Tests are available to any Vernonia resident.

The free health screenings are provided by the Vernonia Lions Club.

