

The INDEPENDENT

Published on the first and third Thursdays of each month by The Independent, LLC, 725 Bridge St., Vernonia, OR 97064. Phone/Fax: 503-429-9410. Publisher Clark McGaugh, clark@the-independent.net Editor Rebecca McGaugh, rebecca@the-independent.net Assoc. Editor Noni Andersen, noni@the-independent.net

Opinion

Apathy reigns supreme in Vernonia; but who cares?

If anybody who pays taxes in Vernonia is ever interested in how the City spends your hard-earned money, it will be hard to find any reliable answers.

The ever-changing budget has become a bad joke. The city council accepts without comment whatever they are told by their hand-picked administrator, M.R. "Dick" Kline.

The budget was a classic exercise in bad government. Kline prepared the budget and provided the budget committee with NO supporting data. He didn't even supply promised year-to-date data on expenditures and income. Why? It wasn't possible because he changed the financial software *during* budget preparation, also changing line items within funds so it was too difficult to explain.

By now, you may have noticed the \$11.50 increase in your water bill that Kline said is needed because of bad fiscal management before he was hired. We are assured that it is only temporary and will be dropped in about a year. There is also the \$12.00 increase to pay for planning of phase 1 of the sewer upgrades.

If anyone is interested, there are other thumb-your-nose-at-taxpayers maneuvers.

Do you remember that city-owned 20 acres of residential property that has been kept as a rainy day fund? On July 24, Kline signed a contract with Chris Balmes, a real estate broker in Tualatin, to represent Vernonia in the sale of that property. Mayor Harrison selected the Tualatin broker based on city planner Aldie Howard's recommendation. She didn't talk to any local brokers, saying she thought an out-of-town broker could do a better job. The council said nothing until last night, when Councilor Whiteman said he didn't like the way the broker was selected and thinks a policy should be developed to avoid hand picking.

Well, the city had an ordinance that limited purchasing and contracting by the administrator without council approval. It was amended last November, giving full authority to the administrator for purchasing and contracting as long as the item is in the budget.

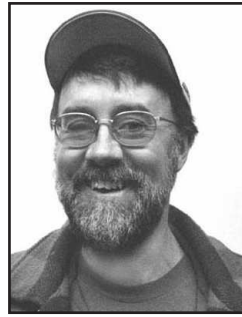
It was amended, unanimously, by the same five people who were sitting at the council table last night.

Incidentally, Kline and Howard don't live in Vernonia. They pay for city utilities elsewhere.



Ike Says . . .

By Dale Webb, member
Nehalem Valley Chapter, Izaak Walton League



Interesting weather we've been having; the Westside of the state is staying moist while the Eastside is burning up. I got to enjoy a few days over east a couple of weeks ago; this was while the fires were going strong. Two things stuck out – how dry it was, and the lack of water in the creeks; some had even gone dry.

Dad and I took our annual trip east, starting up on Aldrich Mountain in the Murderers Creek unit. We were very anxious to see what the big fire there had done to our old hunting grounds. Well, it has changed the scenery, for sure. Most of the thickets burned completely out and almost all the trees within the burn died, very few survived. This is what is called a stand replacement fire. We have used three different hunting camps over the years and all three had burned but, amazingly, one of the camps could be said to have survived. The ground in the burn is covered with green, a lot of this is bearded wheat that USFS has planted to stabilize the soil. We were told that deer and elk would probably not use the wheat as food and we did not see any evidence of foraging. The wheat is supposed to be sterile and will die out as the natural vegetation takes hold. Deer numbers in this area are

very low, we only saw two small bucks. Elk numbers seem to be better, with lots of tracks in the area. Be warned, the bee numbers in this unit are fairly high, we saw a lot of bald face hornets and some yellow jackets. I brought along a screened tent where we set up our dining area so we didn't have to deal with the bees trying to eat our meal. Outside the tent the bees were humming!

Next, we moved over to the Desolation unit where we hunt deer. Our trip was centered on predator hunting and Desolation has a lot more coyotes than up on Aldrich. Actually, it is pretty easy to figure out where coyotes are, if there are deer, squirrels or rabbits in the area, there will be dogs. The weather was very hot so we set up camp and laid around, suffering out the heat. Finally, the temp dipped a bit and Dad led the way over to a water hole in the nearby forest. The water hole was just about dried up but, there in the mud, was a nice sized cougar track. Of course we tried calling the cat in, with no luck. In fact we stunk at calling in coyotes, too, although Dad was able to hand call one in to about 10 yards, of course it was behind him and he only heard it when it took off. With the weather being so warm, the coyotes are probably hunting hard at night and lounging around during the day. The bee numbers were a lot lower in this unit, but we did still use the screen tent to have bug free dining and snoozing.

If you are headed over East in the next couple of months there will be a few things to keep in

Please see page 3