

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

What is fiscal responsibility?

The Vernonia City Council continues to add or alter resolutions to collect more money from citizens without accountability – or maybe they’ve lost the ability to count – again blindly raising rates and levying fees on the recommendation (according to city staff) of the Public Works Committee, although no documentation justifying changes was provided from the committee. In fact, no minutes from that committee have been presented to Council in the last five months (or longer; that’s as far back as we looked).

On the other hand, when asked to change utility rates to a usage-based structure, Council says they can’t do that without a rate study. It seems they need to have the city’s contract engineers do this study before they can determine how much it costs to provide water and sewer services to citizens. They should be able to pencil out an estimate of costs by looking at historical data to see how much they have been spending to get water to us. Yes, it would be a rough estimate because some repair and replacement costs need to be included and they probably don’t have the expertise to calculate that part. But it would be at least something to work from besides what appears, to most citizens who have spoken to us, to be knee-jerk cost raising.

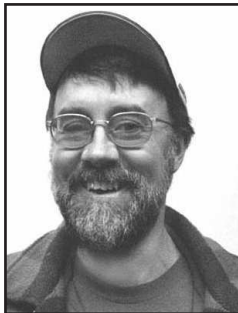
Also, since the Council is worrying about how much citizens should have to pay when they aren’t even using water and sewer (\$10 per month plus turn on/off fees, as of this week), isn’t it time they addressed the “honor system” being used by people who fill up their water tanks at the public works department? The majority of those who utilize this available water aren’t on a city meter because they don’t live in the city.

Speaking of fiscal responsibility, we would like to commend Interim Police Chief Mike Kay for finding a less expensive (in fact, free) alternative to the high tech ICOP in-car camera system that council had budgeted \$8,700 to purchase. Unfortunately, instead of putting the unused money back into the budget (still in “dire financial shape”, right?), Kay asked to keep that money for unspecified needs. Cindy Ball jumped to make the motion for Kay to keep the money and Kevin Hudson seconded, then council unanimously approved. We’re sure that quick approval is not because Ball and Hudson are personal friends of Kay. After all, later at the same meeting they learned all about ethics.



Ike Says . . .

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



Well, now we know what it is like to dodge bullets! After last winter I had decided that wild weather is not fun, now I’m sure of it. This winter will go down in the record books; I have heard but not confirmed that the snowfall this winter was the longest

on-ground event since the winter of ‘68-‘69 (I counted 27 days locally). We had two rainfall events that threatened to melt all that snow and dump it through our town. Luckily the forecasts were off enough to save our bacon.

The snowfall this year has been exceptional, for the folks up in Timber it was unbelievable. I have been told that the snow depth at the height of the event was close to five feet. The elevation at Timber is only 1,000 feet, so higher elevations may have had more. I took some snow measurements during the snow event, this is what I observed: here at the house the highest depth I measured was 18 inches; at 1300 feet elevation on Clatskanie Mountain, I measured 25 inches, when I got up to Timber late in the event, I measured a very condensed 18 inches. What is more important than snow depth, though, is the water content; this is what I found: Clatskanie Mountain on Dec. 27 had 4.1 inches of water; Timber on Jan. 6 had 5.4 inches; Vernonia on Jan. 6 had

2.25 inches, and Rock Creek at Longview Fibre’s mainline had 3.6 inches of water content on Jan. 6. It is the water content of the snow that we need to worry about and, after the rain event on Jan. 1-2, the snow was loaded with water.

The first rain-on-snow event, on Jan. 1-2, failed to produce a flood due to several factors. First, we did not get the wind that was predicted, which could have scoured out the cold air and allowed warmer air to melt the snow at a higher rate. Second, the temperature in the Valley stayed cold and the snow simply did not melt. Thirdly, there was less rain than forecast and there was a gap during the rainfall event, so we did not get the anticipated rise in the river height from the rain and definitely did not get a lot of contribution from the snow water content. Were we at a threat of flooding, most certainly, if all the conditions had lined up we could very easily have had a flood falling somewhere short of the ‘96 event.

The second rain-on-snow event on Jan. 7-8 had a larger bull’s-eye on us. We had high snow water content thanks to the first rain event, the forecast was for higher rainfall, wind, higher temperatures, and the real killer – the river – was still running high from the first event. We need to understand that the base of any flood event is the beginning river height and, this time, it was two feet higher than before any other recent flood event. Fortunately, the rainfall simply did not live up to the forecast. We finally got into the heavy rain on the evening of Jan. 7 but, while it was

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