

The INDEPENDENT

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"Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley"

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Vernonia School Board members, from left, Ernie Smith, Jim Krahn and Tammy Jennings listen intently during discussions of a new school site during the March 12 Board meeting.

Many attend meeting to hear board pick school site

More than 65 members of the Vernonia community attended the March 12 Vernonia School District Board of Directors meeting to hear the announcement that the new school will most likely be built at the "Boot Site" on O-A Hill.

Before voting on the proposed school site, the board heard from Wendy Hemmen during the Public Comment portion of the meeting. Hemmen told the board that she is an engineer in Oregon and has issues with the Boot site, specifically the grading, the steep terrain and the hydrology that causes the fields there to be "very, very wet year round." Hemmen went on to say she saw hillside stability issues and wetlands that will require mitigation. On the other hand, said Hemmen, "The Knott St. site is larger, flatter, with easier to deal with wetlands, and more shovel ready." After Hemmen spoke, Matt Newman, a land use planner in Hillsboro, said, "We're not suggesting not us-

ing the Boot site, just that you consider Knott St. as a backup plan."

Mike Pihl told the board, "I'm here for myself. I agree, no school, no Vernonia. We need a site above the flood plain that can be a community center in a flood."

Community members had submitted written questions, in addition to making comments. One asked, "How much will the bond be?" referring to an amount the community has been told they will need to put in to help build the schools. Board Chair Kim Wallace answered that the bond may be \$10-15 million dollars, but they will work with what they think the community can afford. Wallace and Superintendent Dr. Ken Cox agreed to put together a committee to determine the bond amount.

Another written question was, "Do you have a plan B if a bond doesn't pass?" Wallace's response was, "Yes, we'll be

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Council given update on flood recovery plans

Jim Tierney, Director of Columbia County Flood Relief, gave a presentation to Vernonia's City Council on Monday, March 16, to provide an update on the Columbia County Flood Unmet Needs Committee Project Recap.

The presentation included timelines for completion of flood recovery projects from the December 3, 2007, flood that has recovery completed by the end of 2011. In other comments, Tierney mentioned the need for a 75-year timeline to gradually get all land in the flood plain cleared to allow water to flow better and keep houses out of the damage zone.

More than \$12 million in grant, award, or matching dollars is expected to be used by the end of 2009 to work on 40-50 more elevations, 35 buy-outs, and 10-15 new affordable replacement homes, in addition to the 142 houses that have already been completed county-

wide. According to Tierney, the 142 completed houses were all done with private monies, while the next batch will be done mostly with public funds, Tierney told the council. 40 percent of the homes in Vernonia were flooded, according to Tierney, with 340 homes in the county receiving more than 50 percent damage (termed "substantially damaged").

Tierney's project recap included the statement that overhead expenses (including salaries) have accounted for 9.4 percent of all costs. Tierney mentioned \$12,500 out of donated Columbia County Flood Unmet Needs funds used as a grant to the City of Vernonia as a match to pay the salary of a RARE student whose work has been deemed to be of value to future flood prevention. A grant for \$5,000 was obtained for the rest of the money needed for the RARE student. Not specifically mentioned in the presentation was \$36,000 the

Board of County Commissioners approved to be spent out of the \$180,000 in unspent donated funds, in February. That money is backfilling salaries of a Volunteer Coordinator, Administrative Assistant and Case Manager that cannot be reimbursed using grant money. According to Tierney's recap, \$340,836.28 was the total of cash donations.

The value of volunteer hours is estimated at \$1,935,000 (at \$10 per hour) based on hours secured or donated through February 2009. Now that the weather is improving, volunteers from Christian Aid Ministries (CAM) and others are returning to help with recovery efforts by volunteering their time and expertise on the many projects Columbia County Flood Unmet Needs Committee is overseeing.

(See related article under headline Columbia County Flood Relief... on page 15)

Brown-outs, outages result from problem on BPA transmission line

West Oregon Electric Cooperative (WOEC) customers experienced short outages and brown-outs March 16 and 17. According to General Manager Marc Farmer, the outages were caused by a problem on the B.P.A. (Bonneville Power Administration) Warren Line through St. Helens. They could tell that one of the three phases went down because it caused a brown-out.

WOEC brought in six line crews, sending two to the Timber substation to heat it up. When that was ready, at about 10:17 p.m. Tuesday night, they brought all the power down in

order to switch the power feed from the Chapman line to the Timber line. Then two line crews went to Chapman and switched their feed from the B.P.A. line to the line coming through Vernonia from Timber.

The crews were working Wednesday to find the problem with the B.P.A. Warren line, looking first at a part of the line where a fire earlier in the year may have caused problems. In the meantime, power will continue to come from the Timber station. There may be one more outage when the line is switched back over from Timber to Chapman in the next few days.