

Johnson will contract with city on some issues

The last Vernonia City Council meeting to be guided by Interim City Administrator Jim Johnson was held June 15. Johnson, who started on June 3, 2008, without a lot of fanfare, handled this meeting the same way. No cards, no cake, no teary farewells. Council did, however, approved a consultant contract with Johnson through December 31, 2009, not to exceed \$10,000 for a few ongoing projects. Johnson will continue to handle the Oregon Solutions Project, help with land use issues, plus street and utility work involved in the school siting project, and continue to be the city representative on the wastewater facility plan update project. Johnson will also stay in the office for at least five days after new City Administrator Bob Young's first day on June 22, to help with Young's transition.

The first of three public hearings on amendments to Ordinance 711, the city's land use and development ordinance, provided some excitement, although there were no changes to the amendment, just house-keeping issues to rescind older ordinances and bring them under 711, Title 9. Ordinance 711 outlines such items as fence height, flood mitigation, signage, house numbering and similar issues.

The excitement, such as it was, was the concern of citizens who did not understand the flood plain permit process. Any changes to the footprint on a piece of property in the floodway cannot be permitted. Another citizen found out that a flood plain permit must be obtained, even for those not in the floodway, for such items as fencing and plantings. The flood plain permit application is available without charge from city hall, and must be reviewed before making changes to property that might affect the flow of water during any future flood events. After clearing up those two side issues, the public hearing was completed without problem.

Interim Police Chief Mike Kay asked council what they thought of an idea to charge a fee for the police department to respond to motor vehicle crashes that involve non-residents. This fee would usually be paid

by the motor vehicle insurance. Roseburg and Toledo charge such a fee. In Roseburg the fee is \$160, plus the officers' time and any supplies used. After discussing the pros and cons of such a fee, council asked Kay to look into the idea more and see how it works in Roseburg and Toledo. Council also asked Kay to get more information on a previously mentioned idea to add a fee assessed by the court upon conviction. That fee would be used only for officer training. Scappoose, among other cities, has such a fee.

Johnson presented information to council on the idea brought up at the last meeting of changing the organization of the police department to having a part-time chief of police, a captain, a sergeant, and two patrol officers. Johnson said this change would allow for more actual patrol time as four police would be on the streets instead of a chief (usually in the office) and three officers. The budgetary change would be an initial increase of approximately \$25,000. Mayor Sally Harrison asked if the Captain position would be filled by Mike Kay. Kay's response was, "Don't take that away from your new chief. Let him decide who fills what position." Council ap-

proved the reorganization and the posting for a part-time chief of police position. Additional discussion centered on how to get more officers to live in Vernonia, with the council agreeing they wanted to find ways to provide incentives for officers to live in the district, rather than requiring them to do so. Everyone agreed that it is best for the community when the officers are part of the community.

Johnson told council that the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) put a new finish on the crosswalk by City Hall and asked if council would like them to use that to replace the worn down crosswalks along downtown Bridge St. Council agreed to let ODOT re-finish the crosswalks.

Stimulus dollars will arrive in Vernonia with a \$94,000 grant to overlay paving on Washington Avenue from Bridge St. to C St.

In other business, council:

- Approved a new three-year contract with the Vernonia Police Association,
- approved the 2009-2010 budget,
- approved increases to the cemetery fees.

The next council meeting will be July 6, starting at 7:00 p.m. at Vernonia City Hall.

Republican picnic in Vernonia

The Columbia County Republicans are holding their annual summer picnic/barbeque on Saturday, June 27, in the picnic shelter at Anderson Park in Vernonia. All County Republicans and other interested persons are invited to attend.

This event will be a combination of the picnic and the monthly Republican MeetUp normally held the last Friday of each month (cancelled for June only). Guest speaker will be

Columbia County Commissioner Tony Hyde who will give an update on important issues facing the County.

Lunch will be served at 12:30 p.m. Each family should bring whatever meat they prefer for barbequing and either a side dish or dessert to share. Barbeque grills, plates, cups, plastic ware, napkins, etc. and drinks will be provided. For further information contact Curt Deslatte at 503-201-3001.

Col. Co. at 15.4% unemployment

Columbia County's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate rose to 15.4 percent in April, a significant increase from the previous month (14.1%) and the year before (5.9%). The rate was above the statewide rate (12.0%) and the national rate (8.9%). Total employment rose by 158 to 21,768

and the number of unemployed people rose by 13 to 3,723. Total employment this April was 1,012 fewer than one year before and there were 2,379 more people unemployed this year. April's unemployment rate was the highest the county has had since the current data series began in 1990.

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big corporations pay only \$10 in taxes each year, a corporate minimum that has not changed since 1931. And today, as a share of income, the wealthiest 1% of Oregonians pay less taxes than those making \$40,000 per year.

The Legislature worked hand in hand with the business community to develop a compromise plan and we adopted many of their ideas. Since the creation of the Oregon Rainy Day Fund in 2007, we know that the business community supports the use of tax dollars for the long term stability of Oregon. On Thursday, as the Senate debated and passed the revenue package, an innovative bill was introduced by Rep. Tobias Read (D-27) to make the additional corporate tax revenues a part of the Oregon Rainy Day Fund after the state's economy has stabilized. This is a win-win situation.

Finally, I was honored to be present at the Governor's roll out of a bill I and my colleague Rep. David Edwards (D-30) introduced, the Oregon Emergency Jobs and Training Act, HB3500. This bill will allow un-

employed or underemployed workers to collect unemployment benefits if they enroll in an approved worker training program. The legislation is funded by redirecting \$50 million from the state Unemployment Insurance Trust fund to support the jobs program. An other \$40 million would expand and extend unemployment benefits. The fund currently amounts to \$1.5 billion and has a dedicated funding source through regular payments by employers through payroll taxes. Some aspects of the bill include:

- Creation of 7,100 entry-level jobs with educational benefits lasting 3-6 months
- Continues benefits for 3,500 Oregonians enrolling in training programs for high demand jobs
- Authorizes an extension of UI benefits for 11,000 for the last 3 months of 2009
- Creates an Individual Education Account for every Oregonian who fills a job under this program and dedicates \$2 for every hour worked to a Continuing Education Account.



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There's a saying that if you have your health, you have everything. Well, that's not exactly true - without adequate resources, you could enjoy a long, healthy retirement at a far lower standard of living than you'd prefer!

When preparing for retirement, it's vital to keep in mind the importance of money to your quality of life during your "golden years." And with retirements now stretching as long as 20 to 30 years - and beyond - ensuring your retirement dollars outlive you is a paramount concern.

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