

# The INDEPENDENT

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"Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley"

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The Vernonia School Band added music to the air of celebration for passage of a bond measure to replace flood-damaged schools with new construction...high above the flood plain.

## District voters okay bonds to replace flooded schools

Voters in Vernonia School District 47J passed Bond Measure 5-197 by a margin of almost two to one. Ballots were cast by 1,465 of the 2,165 registered voters, with the measure receiving 893 yes votes and 570 no votes, or 61.04 percent voting yes and 38.96 percent of voters saying no.

Measure 5-197 allows the school district to sell up to \$13 million in bonds to construct new schools out of the flood zones. The bonds will be repaid by property taxes in about 15 years, instead of the originally projected 26 years, due to a federal grant that will pay the interest on the bonds. The increase in property taxes is expected to be about \$1.90 per \$1000 of assessed value.

The \$13 million bond measure is just the beginning of the fund raising that will be required to complete the project, which is expected to cost \$37 million. The district has contracted with Metropolitan Group to raise the rest of the funds needed for the building that will house kindergarten through 12th grade students. It will be located on land the district purchased at and behind the current site of Spencer Park. The original time line calls for construction to begin next spring and for students to start school at the new location in 2011.

A gathering of students, staff, and others was held at Spencer Park yesterday, to celebrate the measure's passage.

## Wu gets funds for City, County

Congressman David Wu has secured \$300,000 for wastewater system improvements in the City of Vernonia, and \$500,000 to support the construction of an emergency operations center in St. Helens.

The funds for Vernonia will help relocate the current wastewater treatment facility at a new location that is not in the city's flood plain, a move that is recommended by both the Army Corps of Engineers and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.

"When Vernonia experienced severe flooding nearly two years ago, it became clear that numerous pieces of the city's infrastructure need to be relocated or renovated in order to withstand future storms," said Wu. "The funds I secured today will help the city take another step toward that goal. Current and future generations of Vernonia residents will all

benefit from having an improved wastewater system in a more secure location."

Construction of an emergency operations center will benefit all areas of the county by providing services during emergencies, training critical first responders, and helping mitigate future incidents.

"The natural disasters that have struck Columbia County in recent years have exposed a critical need for disaster mitigation and emergency response capabilities," said Wu. "This shovel-ready project will provide vital services during an emergency, protecting the lives and homes of Columbia County residents. In addition to enhancing public safety, construction of the emergency operations center will create jobs, resulting in immediate and long-term economic benefits for the region."

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## State denies bid for hospital

A proposed order denying a certificate of need for a 12-bed acute care hospital in St. Helens was issued by the Oregon Department of Human Services Public Health Division on October 22. The hospital was to be located at 35311 Millard Road, St. Helens.

Oregon's Certificate of Need Law is a health planning tool to help ensure that new health care facilities and services improve access to care at a reasonable cost. Under this law, Columbia Health District was required to demonstrate that the project would meet specific criteria in the department's rules in order to receive approval.

"The public told us that primary care is the most important need of the community," said Grant Higginson, M.D., M.P.H., whose office is responsible for  
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## City approves promotion for Kay

City Administrator Bob Young announced, at the November 2 city council meeting, that Sergeant Mike Kay's promotion to Captain has been approved. A scheduled pinning ceremony for this promotion had already been postponed from the October 5 council meeting.

Young said that after some accusations about Mike's background, an investigation found no deceit or untruthfulness during his employment process. "He's clear, and I just wanted to say this publicly," Young said.

The Independent had previously

made a public information request for a copy of Kay's employment application and background check, but has been unable to obtain those public records due to the city setting a prohibitive cost of \$423.00 for the records. State law allows the city to waive such fees if the information is for the public good but, as with past requests, the city has chosen not to do so.

Young's comments may have been related to the fact that the employment application asks the question, "Have you been convicted of a felony?" It was already known that Kay has no felony convictions, but has been convicted of Criminal Contempt of Court for disobeying a domestic restraining order while in uniform as a Newport police officer.

Kay's pinning ceremony may take place at the next council meeting, scheduled for November 16.

**Many activities  
scheduled for  
this weekend!**

**To see what's happening, please turn to page 7.**