

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
Mentor Noni Andersen

Printed on recycled paper with vegetable based dyes

Opinion

Lots going on in Vernonia

There is a lot going on in Vernonia these days. Probably more than at any time since the 1920s when the Oregon-American Mill was being built and the town was growing to meet the increased need for workers there.

Many people, unfortunately, are still waiting to get their homes lifted or bought out so they can get resettled for the first time in over two years, since the Flood of 2007.

As part of that new schools project, it seems like something changes in those plans daily. The latest information will be available at a Town Hall on February 25 (see page one for details). But, don't expect anything to be set in stone yet. Though the district wants to start construction this Spring, plans are not final. One recent change is the possibility of getting some extra FEMA money to buy out the middle school building, which could then be moved to the new site and may house science classrooms and even be a living laboratory for university and college students in Oregon to come work on sustainability and other projects.

If all the current schools are removed, the city will have new park space and there has been recent talk of using some of the Bridge St. park area for the skate park the Lions Club has been working on for over five years.

There is a consultant in town working on a Main Street project to identify what the community would like Bridge Street and the commercial zone to look like in coming years. Speaking of zones, the city is looking to rezone part of Rose Avenue (the Hwy 47 part) from residential to commercial. The city's stated purpose is to move downtown businesses to get them out of the flood zone. Economic development has been on the table recently, too.

There has recently, as in just this week, been talk of a project that would use biomass to fuel some buildings and use our surrounding forestland for biomass or carbon projects.

City Administrator Bob Young recently suggested adding two more Vernonia police officers to serve the school district boundary, not just those who live inside the city. On the other hand, there is a committee set up by the Columbia County Commissioners looking at better meeting the needs of the whole county for law enforcement and one of the ideas being batted around there is getting rid of city police forces and beefing up the Sheriff's Office to handle all law enforcement.

This is a great time to get involved and really make a difference in your community. Join a committee, go to council meetings or even get elected to the city council. There are two council positions, plus the Mayor's seat up for election this fall. Think of the possibilities and help Vernonia reach them.



Out of My Mind . . .

by Noni Andersen



We may be accustomed to political hypocrisy, but the past week has presented a few scenarios that will, or already have appeared on shows such as SNL, The Colbert Report or The Daily Show.

To explain, I watched the live C-SPAN broadcast from the recent Re-

publican Congressional retreat, where they asked questions of, or made comments to President Barack Obama. One GOP complaint was that the president has failed to live up to his campaign promise of making the process of health care reform transparent. The president agreed that he had fallen short, and said he is trying to do a better job of transparency.

This wasn't the first time Republican Congressmen had made that charge, either. Rep. John Boehner, the House Minority Leader, previously slammed the administration for "secret deliberations" for its failure to televise the health care debate; he was also a vocal supporter of C-SPAN's request to televise negotiations. Additionally, all Republican Senators signed a letter to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid seeking "increased transparency" and opposing "closed door negotiations."

Fast forward to the president's announcement of a February 25 health care summit that would include the leaders and key legislators of both

parties, and would be televised by C-SPAN. Did the GOP congratulate themselves for prodding the president to turn words into action? No.

The Republican leadership announced that they wouldn't attend the president's summit unless they could specify who would attend and what would be discussed!?! That was so mind-boggling stupid that even they realized the public knows that, when the president holds a meeting, he issues the invitations and the agenda. So, after months of insisting on transparency, how can they avoid a televised meeting?

Aha! Their current mantra is "How do we know it's not a trap?" and "We can't let ourselves walk into a trap!" If they really believed in their approach to health care reform – and transparency – they would jump at the opportunity to expound their views to the president and the public.

Their problem likely goes back to that retreat, when the president responded easily and logically to policy issues and political attacks in far more detail than they wanted. For instance, when one congressman spoke of "a 2,300 page bill that the Democrats can't pass", Obama didn't say that was a lie, he merely said that both houses had passed it, and that it includes Republican ideas.

Oops, transparency can be uncomfortable.

In case you have forgotten why health care reform is needed: Anthem Blue Cross in California announced a 39% premium increase for individual policyholders, acknowledging that some won't be able to afford it, but they need the increase. In 2009, their parent company, Wellpoint, had record profits in excess of \$2.5 Billion.