

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

City gets good audit news

For the past five years, the yearly required audit of Vernonia's finances has indicated problems with internal controls (for example: too many people with possible access to a stamp used to 'sign' checks). The 2008-2009 audit indicated nine different "significant deficiencies", including not filing the audit timely with the state audit division, required loan reserve amounts not being maintained in separate accounts, and voided checks not being mutilated, just to name a few.

This year, the audit of the fiscal year July 1, 2009, through June 30, 2010, was done on time (also a problem the past couple years).

The only bad news in the audit was some runaway spending during that year, which resulted in our tighter budget for this fiscal year. That came as no surprise, as it was generally well known that prior City Administrator Bob Young was released from his contract early, partly because of that runaway spending.

It is good news that the auditors found no problems with the internal controls, and that the loan reserves were all in place. It had reached the point where we cringed when it was audit time and it was with a huge sigh of relief that we reviewed this one and found such good results. Thanks to all who worked to clean up the problems in these areas. The citizens of Vernonia can breathe easier on this count.

Hiring a City Administrator?

One topic at recent Vernonia council study sessions has been how to proceed with city administrator hiring and whether to consider the current interim, Bill Haack, as a potential candidate. Compared to Dick Kline, Aldie Howard and Bob Young, Haack stands far above those choices. With no prior city administrator experience, he's stepped up and has gotten governmental funds for the city, has improved dialog with county, state and federal officials...and with the citizens of Vernonia. We've heard far fewer complaints from citizens lately about interactions with City Hall.

We have disagreed with all of the above administrators, including Haack. The difference is that Haack maintains professional courtesy, understanding that our work requires us to ask questions; the others attacked us, tried to hide records, even threatened legal action because we did our job. We think Haack deserves consideration by council for the job.



Ike Says . . .

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



Who knows, maybe by this time next year we will be buying our hunting and fishing licenses from the Oregon Department of Natural Resources. Senate Bill 521, sponsored by Senator Starr, would totally revamp all the natural resource departments in the State of Oregon.

The list of departments is long, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, State Parks and Recreation, Department of State Lands, Department of Land Conservation and Development, Land Use Board of Appeals, State Department of Geology and Mineral Industries, Water Resources Department, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, State Forestry Department and Oregon Forest Resources Institute.

As far as sportspeople are concerned, the housing of ODF&W and the State Forestry department under one roof would be interesting, at the least. Many a biologist has been frustrated by the goal to maintain wildlife populations while, at the same time, having no control at all over the habitat that many wildlife species need to survive. Maybe, and this is a big maybe, the biologists might get a little more influence over what is done to wildlife habitat on state forestry lands in the future. The move of all these agencies into one would end the practice of each

agency having its own board of commissioners, the ODF&W would have one board consisting of nine members and a requirement that each commissioner be "well informed" on the laws pertaining to each of seven categories. These categories would be wildlife law, commercial fishing law, outdoor recreation policy, state land administration laws, geology/mines/minerals laws, water resource laws and policy and forestry laws. The nine commissioners would be composed of at least one person who fits each of these categories and one more who represents the interest of people who grow and harvest timberlands.

Frankly, while the system currently in place at ODF&W has not been very open to changes suggested by the people who pay most of the bills, I tend to think that a commission made up of people who have a wider range of interest and focus, would be even harder to persuade to change course over the objections of staff. Also this new commission would have far more decisions to make, since they would be in charge of all these former agencies and their ability to focus on any one agency at a time may be compromised. I also found it strange that timberland producers may actually be able to gain a three-person membership on this commission (forestry law, forest producer and the one position that is not spelled out in the proposal but could be two commissioners in one category).

Noticeably absent from the makeup of the new commission is the agriculture and livestock community that has always been heavily represented.

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